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A VALLEY OF SHADOWS

BY

G. COLMORE

AUTHOR OF

'A LIVING EPITAPH,' 'A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE,' ETC.

Such storms vex human souls,
That they are driven into unknown seas
And dark, strange waters : yet the Power that made
The calm, safe inland bays, made the wild waste, ;
And knows the great waves and the silent rocks,
And knows the whirling tempests that have tossed
The wrecked hulk stranded far away from home



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1892

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A VALLEY OF SHADOWS

Book II. (*continued*).

DINAH.



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CHAPTER XI.

IT was August before Jim Saryll came back to Sleepy Dale. Already in the evenings the shadows stole earlier each day over the hills, and in the mornings the sun delayed its rising ; yet Jim told himself that for him the summer was still to come. Strong with youth and love and hope, it seemed to him that the sun shone whether the sky was cloudy or fair ; and Lucy Hatherden, cheered by his joyous presence, quick to forget, and keen to enjoy, cast away the fears that had darkened the last few weeks, and gave herself up to happiness again.

The mornings were spent chiefly under the trees in the garden, and the afternoons, when the heat of the day was over, were

given up to long rambles over the downs. Sometimes Joel Hatherden came home in time to join in the walk ; more often Lucy, Dinah and Jim went forth alone. They wandered through unknown valleys, guided only by what seemed pleasant at the time ; they paused to rest in shaded hollows or in primitive rustic inns ; they lost themselves and found the way again ; and came home when the light had faded from the hills, half sad that the day was over, yet glad to reach again the shelter of Little Hollow.

So a fortnight passed away. To Lucy Hatherden the days were like a dream of safety and peace ; to Jim Saryll the glamour that lay over them was coloured by a glory of hope ; to Dinah the enjoyment of each day was touched by a sense of expectation, of which she herself was hardly conscious and which, sufficient in its own sweetness, stirred in her no desire that it should pass into fulfilment.

But there came a morning when the sky was dark with heavy rushing clouds,

when lightning flashes mocked the departed sunshine, when thunder rolled and echoed among the hills. The rain came down with angry vehemence ; beneath the dripping trees the water lay upon the hard, parched ground. Lucy looked out of the window sadly.

‘ No sitting out of doors to-day,’ she said, ‘ no walk across the hills. I fear the fine days are over ; the weather has broken at last.’

‘ It’s only a thunder-storm,’ said Jim ; ‘ ten to one it will be fine this afternoon.’

‘ I can’t bear thunder-storms. Hark !’ Lucy shuddered as a peal of thunder crashed over the house. ‘ Come away from the window, Dinah.’

‘ Tisn’t the thunder can hurt you,’ said Joel, going on with his breakfast ; ‘ it’s the lightning does the mischief. I’m always glad to hear the thunder, for then I know the flash is over, and no harm done.’

‘ It’s the thunder I’m afraid of, though, whether I’m right or wrong.’

‘It will not last long,’ said Dinah ; ‘it will soon be over, as Jim says, and then, this afternoon, it will be fine again.’

The prophecy proved true ; in another hour the fury of the storm had passed on beyond Sleepy Dale and the rain fell less heavily ; at mid-day it ceased, and the blue sky showed behind the hurrying clouds. After dinner the sun was shining, and it was determined to start at once, while the weather still was fair, for a walk across the downs to a village a few miles away.

The air was fresh and invigorating after the storm ; the wind gave life to the trees and movement to the shadows ; as Lucy walked down the garden path, the depression that had darkened the morning seemed to take wings and fly away.

At the gate Dinah, glancing up the road, said :

‘Here comes old John with the letters. Shall we wait for him, mother?’

‘Yes, we had better wait.’

‘I will go and meet him,’ said Dinah.

She ran on to meet the old man, toiling slowly along the road, and presently returned with the letters in her hand.

‘One for you, mother, two for Jim, and a newspaper for father—that is all.’

Lucy took the letter that Dinah held out to her, glanced at the writing on the envelope, and turned away while she opened it. She read the first few lines, then folded the letter up and put it in her pocket.

‘I cannot go with you,’ she said, turning to Jim and Dinah again. ‘This letter will need an answer, and I must catch the post.’

‘We will wait for you,’ said Dinah; ‘it doesn’t matter about starting so soon.’

‘I cannot tell how long I may be. I would rather you went on; if I can, I will follow you.’

‘Very well,’ said Jim. ‘We will go by the Beacon, so you cannot miss us, and if

you do not come soon you are sure to meet us coming back.'

'Yes, sure to meet you. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, mother.'

The young man and the girl went side by side down the road towards the downs : Lucy went back to the house. She paused on the doorstep and looked at the landscape, radiant after the rain ; she entered the house and closed the door. Then she went into the hall, and sat down, and began to read the letter.

CHAPTER XII.

THIS was the letter that Lucy read.

‘DEAR MADAM,

‘I beg to acknowledge yours of the second instant, with obliging enclosure. Being used to strictly business ways I ought by rights to have acknowledged before as is customary, but have been much pressed—likewise in a state of indecision *re* our last conference. I have now come to a conclusion that matters are not satisfactory, and have proceeded to arrange a fresh plan in the hopes it will suit both parties.’

So far Lucy had read when she had first opened the letter ; as she read it again her

face flushed, and her heart beat faster. She glanced at the window. The branch of a climbing rose-tree, loosened from its fastening, hung swinging to and fro with a flapping sound; a half-blown rose bruised its petals, beating against the pane. Lucy went to the window, plucked the rose, and bent back the flapping branch. She fastened the rose into her waistband, took up the letter again, and read on.

‘I know, by your having admitted as much, that the little arrangement between you and mother has been a kind of nightmare round your neck, and by management I hope matters can be brought to a settlement for good and all. By agreeing to terms you make yourself free in perpetuity, our part of the bargain being to hand over the first agreement on fulfilment of contract. Your part of the bargain will be better explained by word of mouth, and I write to ask you, this being Tuesday, at

what hour I can have a chat with you on Saturday next and to name the place of meeting. Awaiting a prompt rejoinder,

‘ I remain

‘ Ever yours,

‘ MARTIN WACE.’

‘ A settlement for good and all.’ ‘ You make yourself free.’ Lucy read the words over and over again ; she sat with the open letter before her, and pondered on their meaning ; she felt her heart grow light with hope, then cold with fear. At last she rose, went into Joel’s study, and, standing by his writing-table, wrote a few words. She folded the sheet of notepaper, put it into an envelope, and addressed the envelope : then she stood by the table, hesitating.

‘ If I dared,’ she said to herself, ‘ I would pray to God to help me against this man ; but Anne is right—I dare not pray.’

Her downcast eyes fell upon the rose at her waist : she took it from her belt and looked at it.

‘ Anne says God shows Himself in everything ; I will take this rose as a sign. It seemed to call to me while I read the letter ; if it still has not dropped when I come back, I will take it as a sign that the evil will soon be past. And it has not opened yet—it is hardly more than a bud ; it will not drop.’

Suddenly Lucy threw up her hands above her head.

‘ God, I take it as a sign : God, if I might be free, I could repent.’

She put the rose carefully back into her waistband, and passed through the hall out into the garden, and thence along the road to Barhaven. The fresh breeze blew about her as she walked ; the paling sunshine came in long slanting beams over the hill stretching before her ; behind her the thick gray clouds sank towards the sea. Her

spirits rose as she went along ; a strange exhilaration coloured all her thoughts ; the air, floating past her, seemed to whisper promises of hope. She did not pause in her rapid walking till she had reached the town and posted her letter ; then she went more slowly through the streets to the Library, where Joel Hatherden spent his days.

She passed through the large public room and entered a small one leading out of it, on the door of which was written, 'Librarian.'

'Joel, I have come to fetch you home.'

Joel glanced up with a smile, then bent his head again.

'One minute, Lucy. I have something to finish here.'

Lucy sat down while he turned over page after page of a catalogue, making notes and marks as he went along. At last he closed the book.

‘Do you want to go now?’ he asked.

‘Joel, I believe you like your books much better than me.’

‘Truly, Lucy? Well, I will come now, so as to give you no hold against me. But this catalogue—you see there’s going to be a large sale in London, and Mr. Redmond, he wanted to know what books we’re most in need of. He’s a grand man; he’ll make the Library a fine library before he’s done.’

‘The storm is quite over; it is a glorious evening.’

‘Is it? I’m very glad; we’ll have a nice walk home. Come, Lucy, I’m ready now.’

On the top of the hill Joel and Lucy Hatherden stood and looked back towards the sunset. The bright clouds had shared their glory with the sea, and the reflected glow of the sunset stretched to the furthest east.

‘I told you it was a splendid evening,’ said Lucy.

‘Yes, and it’s more than that,’ answered Joel; ‘it promises well.’

‘It is true; it promises well; it is full of hope.’

Lucy raised her hand to her waist and felt for the rose.

‘Joel, do you believe in signs?’

‘What sort of signs?’

‘Signs that good is to come, or evil, signs of hope—omens.’

‘I don’t know; it seems to me we’re not to look for signs nowadays; it’s all a matter for Providence, I take it.’

‘Yes, Providence, that’s what I mean, Providence can give signs.’

‘God sent a sign in the old days to Gideon, and He could do as much now, no doubt; but He doesn’t seem to work by signs in our time, by all I hear and know.’

‘Yet He might,’ said Lucy. ‘I believe in signs.’

When she reached home, she put her rose in water ; the outer petals were beginning to turn brown, but the flower was firm and whole.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON Saturday morning Lucy Hatherden set out alone from Little Hollow. She took her way inland over the downs towards a narrow valley winding between steep hills. Her face was pale with excitement; her eyes were bright with restless hope; in her hand she carried a withered rose.

The valley, when she reached it, was still with the stillness of utter solitude; she waited, walking to and fro, half relieved, half impatient, to find the time was not yet. Ten minutes passed away; the feeling of relief became lost in growing suspense; each slowly gliding moment seemed slower than the last. At last, at the top of the sloping sweep of green, a figure

showed itself: it stood for a minute looking round at the stretch of hills, then sauntered down towards the valley. Lucy stopped her restless walking, and stood still, her right hand clasped over the hand that held the rose. Martin Wace drew near and stood before her with his usual awkward air, half insolent, half abashed.

‘Good-morning,’ he said, taking off his hat and wiping his brow. ‘It’s terribly hot this morning, and these hills are hard walking when you’re used to streets.’

‘What is my part of the bargain?’ was all Lucy answered.

‘You’re in a great hurry! I must get my breath before I can say much.’

‘Yes, I’m in a hurry. What is your new plan?’

‘Well, it wants to be explained gradually. It’s very advantageous to you. You saw that from the letter?’

‘Tell me the plan.’

‘I think I’ll sit down a bit; we’re not used to these rough hills in London.’

Martin Wace sat down, and twisted his handkerchief in his fingers as he spoke.

‘I’d better begin at the beginning, perhaps.’

Lucy made no reply; she still stood with her hand clasped over the rose; her eyes looked steadily at the downcast face beneath her.

‘I’m thinking of making a fresh start in life,’ Martin Wace went on; ‘I’ve tried several things; I’ve tried the law, and I’ve tried the City—in various branches. But so far I’ve been, so to say, an underling, and I’ve a fancy to try being master.’

‘Well? Go on.’

The man looked up for a moment, startled by the concentrated eagerness of the low voice above him.

‘It’s no good trying to drive me,’ he said sullenly. ‘I must have my time; it’s my way of putting things.’

He cast down his eyes again, and went on with his former slow utterance.

‘I’ve a fancy for being master, and I’ve the chance of a good opening. It’s a first-rate business I’ve got the chance of, and anyone with his wits about him ’ld soon be a rich man; I could hold a good position, I could, and with my education, I don’t feel disposed to keep on living amongst the lower classes, when I might be a gentleman. You’d benefit by it too; the higher I am, the higher you’d be.’

‘I don’t understand; your position can make no difference to me.’

‘It can, though, as you’ll see by-and-by, if you’ll only wait a bit. It’s like this, you see—the business wants capital, and I’ve got no capital to speak of.’

The man paused for a minute, but Lucy said nothing, and presently he went on:

‘Now, so far, you’ve paid an allowance, so much a year.’

‘Not to you,’ Lucy broke in, ‘to your

mother. It will cease at her death ; you have no claim upon me.'

'We needn't talk about claims,' said Martin Wace. 'I didn't come here to argue ; what I've come for is to propose a plan, and what you've got to do is to agree to it, or to set me against you. It isn't a question of claims, it's a question of who's strongest.'

Lucy's hand closed more tightly round the rose.

'Go on,' she said in a low voice.

'An allowance is all very well,' continued Martin Wace, 'but if you was to die or mother was to die—though she's much better, as I said—there might be awkwardnesses, and mother 'ld like me to be provided for. Now there's a way of settling matters, once and for all, and no more disputes or bother ; and my plan is for you to hand me over the capital.'

'Then your plan is out of the question. Such a thing is impossible.'

‘You would get the agreement in exchange, and nobody ’ld have any more hold over you.’

‘It is impossible. You must know that I could not do it.’

Lucy walked a few paces, looked up at the calm sky above her, pressed her hands against her breast, turned, and walked back again.

‘Listen,’ she said, bending over the man still seated on the grass, ‘I would do it, cruel and unfair as it is, I would do it—if I could. I do not care for the money, and I would give it, I would give anything I had the power to give, willingly, for the sake of being free. But I dare not. You must see, even while you propose it to me, you must see and know that I cannot do it. How could I give you the capital, when my husband, when my son know that I have it? What reason could I give? What excuse could I make? It has been hard enough to manage to pay the allow-

ance ; and if my husband had been other than he is, I could never have done it. But this—don't you see that the freedom you offer would serve only to raise up a crowd of doubts and suspicions about me ?'

'Yes, I see that—if the money was to be handed over without a why or a wherefore.'

'Then why did you ask me to come here ? And why do you waste time in proposing an impossible plan ?'

'I haven't come to the end of the plan yet. You'll find I'm not one to waste my time ; it'll all come clear at the end. Would you think, now, I was a marrying man ?'

'I have never thought, but I don't see—can't you keep to what matters ?'

'It matters a good deal ; that's just it. I want a wife when I begin business ; I want to settle down stylish and respectable ; and wife and business hang together.'

‘You mean that you cannot marry unless I give up to you all that I possess? Even if it is so, it does not make it any the more possible for me to do it.’

‘That depends upon the wife.’

‘How?’

Martin Wace got up from the grass, and began to walk slowly to and fro.

‘The first time ever I came to see you, I passed the remark that your stepdaughter was a good-looking girl.’

‘My stepdaughter? What has that——?’

‘Yes, I remarked her then, and I’ve taken occasion to observe her many times since. I can’t say I’ve had any conversation with her beyond a good-morning and so on, but she takes my fancy; there’s something genteel about her; and I’m sure she and I’d make a good job of it together.’

Lucy Hatherden watched the young man as he strolled leisurely backwards and forwards, and the bewilderment in her face

gave way slowly to a look that was almost terrified.

‘The only thing I object to,’ Martin Wace went on, ‘is her name; it’s a common, country-sounding sort of a name, is Dinah. But it’s easy to change a name, and I should call her Gwendoline—or Dora, perhaps, as it begins with a D, the same as her own.’

Lucy made a step forward.

‘Do you mean—do you actually mean to suggest that you should—marry my daughter?’

‘Yes, that’s my meaning. I’ve put it pretty plain, haven’t I? The money comes as her dowry, so it’s all fair and square, and a piece of plain sailing, as they say.’

‘Then your plan is more utterly impossible, even, than it seemed before. I could never consent to it, never agree even to consider it.’

‘It’s a good deal of money, I know; I

thought perhaps you'd make a stand against it; but it'd seem a graceful act after your husband taking pity on you like he did; and after all, you can't really want it, living in this out-of-the-way place here.'

'You do not understand—I suppose you cannot; the giving the money has nothing to do with it.'

'That's all very fine; but if it isn't the money, what is it?'

'It's you, yourself—you. Do you suppose for an instant that I would agree to think of Miss Hatherden marrying such a man as you?'

The young man stood still, and his sallow face flushed.

'Oh it's that, is it? You don't think I'm good enough?'

'You are so utterly beneath her in every way, that the idea even of such a thing, is one I cannot conceive.'

'Beneath her? Beneath the daughter

of a farmer or whatever he is? Or perhaps it's yourself your thinking of; I'm not good enough to be son-in-law to——'

'Hush! You know I am not what you would like to think me.'

'You may or you may not be; but I shouldn't care to be in your place if mother was to speak out.'

The fear grew strong in Lucy's eyes; her voice took a tone of entreaty.

'You must not think of this plan, indeed you must not. I will help you as much as I can—with money; I will do all that is possible, I will give you everything I can, and the little that I have saved from time to time. But this—indeed I told you the truth—it is impossible. The child does not know you, nor does her father, nor anyone; you are a stranger to us all—to me, too, as far as they know. You must see that it could never be.'

'I like the girl, I tell you, and I like the plan, and I mean to have a try for it. Of

course I don't expect her to marry me straight off; girls is mostly shy, or pretends to be, and you have to do a bit of courting before they come round. But I'm not new at the business, I've had some experience; and I haven't generally found them too backward.'

There was a half-smile on the man's face as he ended; his wounded vanity was healed as he recalled his past triumphs. Lucy Hatherden shrank away from him.

'She is different, my daughter is different, from the women you have known. Believe me, your plan is impossible.'

'Well, it's got to be tried anyhow, and you've got to do your part.'

'What do you call my part?'

'You've got to use your influence, to stand up for me, to persuade——'

'I cannot do it,' Lucy broke in; 'it is useless; I will not do it.'

'You must do it. Look here, I've made up my mind, and if you don't do as

I say, out comes the whole thing, and you take your chance.'

'But if I go on paying you, if I promise to go on always, if I give you all, everything I can, keeping only just a little, so that I have not to ask my husband for money? if I do this, surely you will give up this plan! It cannot advantage you in the end to drive me to despair!'

'There's no need for despair; you've only got to do what I tell you, and that's simple enough—to begin with, at any rate.'

Lucy turned away.

'I cannot do it.'

She came back a step or two.

'What is it you want me to do—to begin with?'

'I'm going to take up my quarters in the village, and I shall come and call at Little Hollow. You must give me a bit of a welcome, and introduce me to the family. I mean to come pretty often the next week or two.'

‘And if I refuse?’

‘Well, I shall ask your husband, and your son, perhaps, to come up to London, and have a chat with mother.’

The woman with her frightened eyes looked all round at the bare, lonely hills, then back to the stolid face before her.

‘But if I did it, if you came and I—I gave you every opportunity to see my daughter, it does not follow that you would succeed; after all, you might not succeed.’

‘I’ll take my chance of that.’

‘Yes, but still, if you should fail? what then?’

‘It depends; you can do a good deal, you know, and if I don’t succeed, owing to not being properly backed up, it might be the worse for you. But we needn’t talk of that just now; I don’t want to be too hard upon you, and all you have to do at present is to give me a welcome when I call.’

Lucy's head dropped forward on her breast.

‘When do you come?’

‘I shall call to-morrow, in the afternoon.’

‘Wait till Monday. They don't receive visitors about here on Sundays, and on Monday—my son will have gone.’

‘Your son? Well, perhaps it will be as well to wait. That's settled then?’

Lucy did not answer; she stood with her eyes upon the ground; she made no sign that she heard the question. Martin Wace watched her for a little while.

‘I shall come,’ he said: ‘it's your concern how I'm received.’

He walked away up the hillside, looking back now and again at the motionless figure below.

Lucy did not stir till he had disappeared over the brow of the hill; then, still without raising her head, she moved forward slowly along the valley. Suddenly her

glance fell upon the withered rose which she still held firmly clasped in her hand. With a cry she flung it away from her.

‘The sign was false ; God mocks at me. He has no pity ; why should I repent ?’

She walked on more rapidly, her face set, her eyes half closed, hating to see the sunlight : behind her the scattered petals of the rose were carried hither and thither by the breeze.

CHAPTER XIV.

As Lucy drew near to Little Hollow her footsteps lingered; slowly and yet more slowly she went; and when at last she reached the garden gate, she stood with her hand upon the latch, fearing to enter. Within the garden, beneath the branches of the beech-tree, Dinah sat on a low seat; on the grass at her feet lay Jim Saryll looking up into her face; Lucy could hear the murmur of their voices as they talked. At last she raised the latch and passed through the gate: at the sound of her footsteps on the gravel, Jim looked round and sprang to his feet, and Dinah, rising from her chair, came forward by his side to meet her. The

girl's head was bent a little, and the colour came and went in her face : the man held himself proudly, and his eyes were full of rejoicing.

‘Mother, we have been waiting for you,’ said Jim. He took Lucy by the hand and led her over to the beech-tree. ‘Sit down ; we have something to tell you, Dinah and I.’

Lucy glanced up at him quickly, then drew in her breath and held it while she looked from his face to Dinah's, half hidden as she knelt beside her.

‘You need not look so frightened, mother.’ Jim laughed. ‘It is nothing so very terrible.’

‘Tell me—quickly, Jim.’

‘Can't you guess?’ asked Jim.

Dinah put her face close to the pale face with the parted lips.

‘Mother, surely you can guess!’

Lucy tried to speak, but her voice died away again.

‘You must tell me,’ she said at last, in a whisper.

‘It is nothing very new that we have to tell,’ said Jim; ‘it is only the saying it that is new. You must have seen, you must have known, that from the time I first came here, I have wanted Dinah for my wife.’

Lucy’s eyes were cast down; she still spoke in a whisper.

‘Yes—I had forgotten—but yes, I noticed—I had thought it.’ She raised her head. ‘And Dinah?’ she said, looking into the girl’s face. ‘What does she say?’

‘Oh mother,’ Dinah answered, ‘you need not look at me like that, you need not be afraid. What could I do but love him? I love him as well as you could wish.’

Lucy looked at the two young faces; she tried to smile, she tried to speak; but the misery within her was more than she could master, and suddenly she covered

her face with her hands and broke forth into bitter weeping.

‘Mother, what is it? What has happened? What have we done?’

‘It is nothing.’

For a time the sobs would have their way, for a time Lucy could not control the violence of her emotion; at last, looking up, she tried once more to smile, and her voice, quivering and broken, spoke through her tears.

‘It is nothing. It is only that I am not well to-day; I have walked too far and tired myself, and the news came suddenly, and—it seemed more than I could bear.’

‘But you are glad? surely you are glad?’ Dinah asked, with pleading, doubtful face.

‘Oh yes, I am glad, I am very glad. That is why—don’t you know one often cries when one is glad?’

‘And you must have known,’ said Jim, ‘that it would come to this.’

‘ Ah, I might have known !’

‘ You must have been very blind, I think, if you did not know.’

There was a moment’s silence ; then Jim said, half smiling and half wistfully :

‘ You have not wished us joy, mother. Will you not say some word of good-will, of—blessing ?’

Lucy rose from her chair, and put her arms round her son’s neck, and let her head lie on his breast, as it had lain the day of their first meeting.

‘ Jim,’ she said, ‘ I would bless you—if I could, if I dared, if I might. But I am afraid ; it seems to me that evil follows me ; I fear lest my blessing should turn into a curse.’

‘ Do not speak so, you must not speak so ; you have many who love you to stand between you and evil. Give me your blessing, mother ; I do not fear the evil that you dread.’

‘ My son, may God bless you ; you are

pure and good ; surely, in His justice, God will keep you from the evil !'

Lucy raised herself and went over to Dinah and put her hands on the girl's shoulders.

'Dinah, I would make you happy if I could. All the years that I have lived with you, I have tried to make your life free and happy, as the life of a girl should be ; now, still, I would make you happy—if I could, if I only could !'

She bent forward and kissed the wondering face, then turned and went quickly into the house.

The young man and the girl stood and looked at each other silently for a while.

'What is it, Jim ?' asked Dinah at last. 'Why is it that mother seems so strange and—and frightened almost sometimes ? And just now too, when I thought she would be so pleased.'

'She has had a great sorrow in her life,'

the young man answered gravely, 'a great sorrow and a great fear ; it haunts her and troubles her yet.'

'I knew she had had a great sorrow, but I thought it was past long ago, that it was quite over now.'

'It is over, but the shadow of it stays. Dinah, it is something you will have to know about before we are married, and perhaps it will make a difference to you, perhaps it may come between us.'

'Why should it?'

'Because you might not care—there is a sort of slur upon my name.'

'You can do as you like,' said Dinah, 'you can tell me what it is, or you need not tell me. Whatever it is, it can make no difference ; nothing can come between us.'

Then the lovers sat down again beneath the tree, and talked of themselves and of the long sweet life before them, till by-and-by Lucy came out of the house again,

and called to them. The colour had come back to her face, and her eyes were bright ; she carried a basket in her hand.

‘ Come and help me to pick flowers,’ she said. ‘ The house must be bright and gay with flowers, in honour of what has happened to-day. We will pick all we can find ; the autumn is coming and we need not save them. But to-day is still summer, and it shall be a gala day.’

CHAPTER XV.

IT was Monday afternoon. The day was sultry, and heavy clouds lurked in the borders of the sky ; in the fields the labourers worked hard to get the last loads of corn carried safely in ; the swallows flew close to the ground ; the wind was dead.

Lucy Hatherden stood by the garden gate and watched, looking now along the road that led to Sleepy Dale, and now towards the hill. At last, through the still air, came the sound of a measured tread, and then round the curve of the road a man's figure showed itself. Lucy walked away from the gate and sat down on the seat under the beech-tree. She bent her

head over her embroidery, and she did not look up when Martin Wace reached the gate, raised the latch, and entered; but when he was half-way up the path leading to the house, she rose and went towards him.

‘Will you come and sit down under the tree?’ she said.

She led the way back to the seat: Martin Wace followed her and sat down by her side. He looked about him for a few minutes, while Lucy once or twice seemed about to speak, yet still kept silence.

‘Where’s the young woman?’ he asked at last.

‘Miss Hatherden is out; I expect her back by-and-by.’ Then Lucy dropped her voice and spoke quickly. ‘I wanted to see you alone, I wanted to tell you that your plan is no good, that you must think of something else, that I have no power to do anything in the matter, that it is utterly useless for you to come here.’

‘And why, may I ask? I thought we’d

come to an understanding. You were to do your part, and as for its being of use or no use, that's my look-out.'

'I know, but it was different then, on Saturday. I did not know till I got home—though I might have known, I might have thought of it and told you; but I did not know, and I did not think of it at the time. But now I must tell you, and you will see that you have no chance. Miss Hatherden is to be married to my son.'

Martin Wace did not answer; Lucy, glancing up at him, saw that his heavy face, red and moist with the heat, was dark with anger.

'I should have told you,' she said timidly, 'I should have told you that such a thing was likely. You must think of some other plan; you see that I am powerless to help you in this.'

Martin Wace brought down his clenched fist on his knee.

‘Do you think I care for your son?’ he said, ‘do you think I’m inclined to let him and his love-making come between me and my plans? Why should I? Why should I stand by and let him carry all before him? He’s always had the best of it, and me the worst; it’s always been me underneath and him above, all our lives. It’s my turn now, and I’ve no fancy for knuckling under; I see no reason for changing my plans; I’m as good a man as him; and it’s to your interest to be on my side.’

Lucy’s embroidery dropped from her trembling hands.

‘Oh no, oh no,’ she said, ‘you will not have the cruelty—I will do anything, anything. But this—it must be useless, it can do nothing but bring misery.’

‘What do I care for misery? I win or I lose; it can’t hurt me; it’s you—here she is.’

Dinah had just entered the gate, and

was coming slowly towards the beech-tree; she stopped and hesitated when she saw that Lucy was not alone. Martin Wace rose, and looked from the girl to the woman.

‘Dinah,’ said Lucy, going forward and speaking in a low, hurried tone, ‘this is Mr. Wace, my — friend from London. He is staying in the village, and has come to see us.’

‘Good-afternoon, miss.’

Martin Wace raised his hat clumsily; he had held out his hand, but it dropped again by his side.

‘Good-afternoon,’ answered Dinah. ‘I remember seeing you before; I am glad to see you again, if you are mother’s friend.’ She turned to Lucy. ‘I am rather tired; I think I will go in.’

She moved towards the house: Lucy followed her.

‘No, do not go; it will be a help to me if you will come and talk to Mr. Wace.’

‘I will come if you like ; it is only that I have just said good-bye to Jim, and I did not feel as if I should care for strangers. But if you like, I will stay.’

‘Yes, stay. I am tired, and not able to talk to him much, and if you would be polite to him, it would help me.’

‘Of course I shall be polite. How could I be rude to anybody who is your friend?’

Dinah went back to the tree and sat down.

‘You come often to Sleepy Dale. It is not many weeks, I think, since you were here before?’

‘Yes, I keep on coming back. You’re surprised, I dare say.’

‘Oh no, I am not at all surprised. Why should I be?’

‘Well, it’s a dull, countrified place, you see, to anyone accustomed to London ; and there’s no parade, or any attractions for visitors.’

‘I have never been to London, and I don’t know what a parade is; but it seems to me very natural that people should like to come to Sleepy Dale.’

‘And so it is, miss, so long as you reside in the neighbourhood.’

Dinah looked up quickly and glanced from the complacent face opposite her to the pale, half-hidden one beside it.

‘Miss Hatherden is not used to compliments,’ said Lucy hurriedly; ‘you will do well to abstain from them.’

‘That comes of being buried in the country. She’d soon get used to them in London; and she’d hear plenty, I’ll be bound.’

Dinah’s face flushed; she was vexed, hardly knowing why; but after a minute she spoke again.

‘Are you a good walker, Mr. Wace? There are many fine walks about here among the hills.’

‘Well, I can’t say I’m one for much

exercise. I mostly take a turn in the Park of a Sunday, but I'm not over fond of tramping about. Not but what in pleasant company, I have no objection to a bit of a stroll. Now if you would do me the honour——'

'It must be tea-time,' Lucy broke in. 'Dinah, what is the time? Surely tea must be ready!'

'It wants a quarter of an hour of the time yet, mother.'

'Tell Phœbe that we will have it at once, to get it ready at once, unless'—Lucy paused a moment—'unless, perhaps, Mr. Wace will not be able to stay.'

'I can stay.'

'Then go, Dinah.'

When Dinah had disappeared into the house Martin Wace turned to the woman by his side.

'I'm to be treated civilly, remember, whenever I choose to come here.'

Lucy answered him impetuously :

‘ It does not matter how you are treated. Whatever I did, it would be all the same ; your own ways and speeches would make the girl hate you ; the more she sees of you, the more hopeless it will be. You had better give it up at once ; whatever comes of it, you will never get your way.’

‘ I will never give it up ; it’s not my way to give up ; I go through to the end. If I do not get my way, I will get something else, I will do what I said I would do.’

Lucy’s lips quivered ; she still sewed on with great unsightly stitches, not seeing what she did, but struggling for composure.

‘ If you do that,’ she said at last, ‘ if you do your worst, you lose all that you gain by leaving me in peace—you lose the money.’

‘ I know what I’m about ; you need not think about that ; all you’ve got to think about is that you must either help me, or take

the consequences. Say quick—which is it to be? Will you help me, or not?’

At last Lucy looked up: the face beside her, coarse, animal heavy, was set in lines of sullen determination; in it was no sign of relenting, no trace of pity. As she looked, the faint courage that had been in her eyes faded out of them: abject terror looked forth alone, saw only death in all the outer world, and sank back into her soul.

‘Shall I tell?’ the man began.

The woman raised one shaking hand.

‘Hush!’ she said under her breath; ‘I will help you.’

CHAPTER XVI.

A FORTNIGHT passed away. On a still September afternoon Lucy Hatherden sat by an open window and looked forth on the garden and the fields beyond. A glow of sunshine still lingered in the valley, but grew each minute fainter, for the sun had reached the brow of the hill, and soon would sink behind it. Idle, Lucy sat, and gazed forth at the peaceful scene; yet her eyes took no comfort from the flowers or the fields or the quiet hill; her outward vision was blinded as she sat and thought, and her inward vision looked on scenes that held no hope of peace. All at once she started: far off, through the still air, she seemed to hear a sound. She listened.

Yes, it was a sound that came nearer and grew distinct—the sound of running feet. Then Lucy's breath came fast and her face flushed and paled, and she said :

‘ It is over now.’

Through the garden gate, flung wide open, came Dinah, quickly up the path, through the open door into the house, and into the hall where Lucy sat. She flung herself down by Lucy's side, and kneeling, clung to her.

‘ What is it, Dinah ?’

‘ That man——’

‘ Yes, what is it ?’

‘ He says, he has dared to say——’

‘ What—has he said ?’

‘ He said—he has asked me to marry him.’

There was a silence. Dinah's breath came quick and gasping in her agitation ; Lucy breathed quickly too.

‘ And that has—displeased you so ?’

‘ Yes.’ The girl half raised herself,

and, still kneeling, looked up into Lucy's face. 'Mother, day after day I have seen him, spoken to him, walked with him over the hills and paths where I have walked with Jim, because you told me he had been your friend, because you told me he would not stay here long. Because he was your friend I would not speak, I would not tell you how I shrank from him, how his ways displeased me, how his words offended me ; I bore it—I think because of something in your eyes that asked me to bear it ; but to-day——'

'To-day?'

'To-day I am sorry that I did it, sorry that I did not turn from him at once.'

'Yet you should hardly—Is it a fault in him that he should want to marry you?'

'Yes, it is a fault ; it is horrible—horrible that he should say he loves me. He? When Jim loves me! Mother, don't you see that it is dreadful to be loved by a man like that?'

Lucy shivered slightly. 'I see. Yes, it is dreadful.'

'And he, when I told him, he said that I had made him believe I was willing to marry him, and that he would not take me at my word, and that he would not give me up. He said he still would marry me, and that I should find I would be his wife at last.'

Dinah sank down again ; again she hid her face, again she clung to Lucy, as though she clung for safety from some danger she was not strong enough to combat alone.

'Did he frighten you, Dinah ?'

'Yes, he frightened me. What can I have done that he should have dared to speak to me like that ? should have dared to say that he had a better right to me than Jim ? should have dared—— Mother, I will write to Jim and ask him to come back at once.'

'No, no, Dinah, you must not indeed—

I mean, it would be hardly wise. Jim is hot - tempered, as you know, and besides——'

'Besides what?'

'You are quite sure that—you have quite decided to marry Jim?'

'Mother, what can you mean? Can you have any doubt that I love Jim with all my heart? that my love for him has come to be the chief thing in my life?'

Lucy clasped her hands : she did not look at Dinah, but out through the open window where the dusk was making quiet way.

'Ah no,' she said, 'I cannot doubt.' Then, after a minute, she turned her head again. 'Dinah, day after day, there is something I have meant to tell you for the last few weeks ; day by day I have put it off, saying—to-morrow ; but now I will not put it off any more. I should have told you when Jim first asked you to be his wife, but I am a coward—I would

always rather hide from what I fear than face it; and so I put off telling you. But now I will tell you; perhaps when you have heard it, you will not want to marry Jim any more.'

'Jim said there was something,' Dinah answered, 'but you need not tell me if you do not like; it can make no difference.'

'I told him I would tell you, and now I must; I must do everything I can.'

'Everything you can? I don't understand. What do you mean, mother?'

'No matter what I mean; I hardly know myself. Stay quietly where you are, Dinah: I don't want you to look at me while I speak.'

Dinah, sitting on the floor, laid one arm across Lucy's lap, and bent her head on the arm.

'I will stay so,' she said.

'I must go back to things that happened long ago,' Lucy began, 'I must go back

first of all to the time when I was quite a child, not more than ten years old. My father died then; my mother was left alone with me. She cared chiefly for riches and pleasure; she was left with poverty and me. I was brought up—we lived an odd, wandering sort of life altogether—I was brought up to marry.'

'To marry? How do you mean?'

The head was raised from the arm; the eyes looked up wide and questioning.

'Just that. Put your head down again, Dinah. You have lived in a world that is out of the world, and it is difficult for you to understand, but I mean just what the words say; the one aim of my life was to find a husband—a rich one, of course. I succeeded—admirably; the man I married was very rich. He was also very—but that does not matter now.'

'Did you love him very much?'

'No. I have told you often that there are many different worlds: in the world I

lived in then, people often married without love.'

'And didn't he love you either?'

'He—he bought me, and he gave me his name; I was very pretty when I was sixteen; as love goes in the world I lived in then, I dare say he thought he loved me when he married me—and for a month or two afterwards. I was quite happy at first; I had a good deal of my mother's nature in me, and I enjoyed the easy life and the having everything I wanted; and then, when Jim was born, I was happier still.

'All went on fairly well for the next five years; my husband had ceased to pretend to care for me, but I did not mind that; I had everything I wanted, and I amused myself in my own way. About that time my mother died; and it was soon after her death, I think, that my husband began to treat me badly. I don't know why it was, and I hardly remember how it began, but instead of merely neglecting me, he seemed

to take a positive pleasure in thwarting me and seeing me suffer. I need not tell you what he did, nor how we drifted farther and farther apart ; but at last, when he had cut me off from society, admiration, all the things I cared for, had given up the house in London and made me live all the year at Raynfold, had left me nothing to interest myself in but my child ; then, when Jim was ten years old he took him from me too. He sent the child to school, and made him pass his holidays with his grandfather in Yorkshire, saying that he would probably be his heir and it was better for him to grow up knowing the place and the people about, than to get interested in Raynfold, which is a smaller and less valuable property. When I complained, he said he did not like my way of bringing up the child ; and his family, who had been angry at his marriage and had never liked me, took his part.

‘ Another five years went by. My

husband, amongst his other characteristics, numbered a love of drink ; it had hardly been noticeable when I married him ; it increased as time went on—and it increased rapidly. At the beginning of those five years when he sent Jim away I had begun to hate him ; at the end of that time I loathed him too.’

Lucy paused : Dinah, without looking up, moved a little and kissed the clasped hands resting near her head, then laid her head down again. The chill of autumn was in the air ; outside the leaves made a gentle rustling as a low wind stirred them ; the dusk had dimmed the outer world. Lucy Hatherden sat silent for awhile in a world where all was distinct and clear ; then went on with what she had to tell.

‘ It was an autumn evening that ended it all, later on in the year than this—in October. I was sitting in my boudoir ; I was all alone ; I was utterly weary of my

loneliness. My husband had been out shooting; as I sat, I heard him come in. I heard him swearing at the servants in the hall below; then I heard him stumbling up the stairs. As I listened, my face was towards the window; I remember the look of the sky; it was grey—a moving grey, for the wind was rising, and the half-stripped trees in the park swayed to and fro. I heard the uncertain steps come along the passage to my room: they entered, and I turned from the window to my husband. I knew what he would look like, I knew his mood would be sullen and his words foul; and it was as I knew it would be; he stood a few yards away from me and railed at me in senseless anger. His shooting cap was still on his head, his gun was in his hand; he leaned the gun against a table near at hand. I moved back; he followed me; he stumbled against the table; he and the gun fell to the ground together.’

Dinah looked up as Lucy paused, but the question on her lips died away unuttered ; there was such a strange look in the eyes above her, such a pallor on the face. Then, at last, a sigh came from Lucy's lips.

‘He was dead when they came and lifted him up,’ she said. Glancing downwards, she met Dinah's gaze. ‘Lay down your head, hide your face from me.’ She bent her head low over the head upon her knee ; she whispered very softly. ‘They said I did it.’

‘Mother!’

In an instant Dinah was erect, facing the pale face with the fading light upon it.

‘Oh mother ! how could they dream—dare to think of such a thing ?’

‘Because’—the wan face in the wan light was quivering ; the lips moved with an effort ; the words came slowly—‘because they said the shot could not have

entered—the position of the wound—I do not understand. And I waited—I do not know how long, but in my horror I waited there alone ; I did not call at once for help. It was all against me.'

Dinah came forward.

'You must have suffered ! Poor, unhappy mother, you must have suffered all this time, and I, in my thoughtlessness, never knew.'

'It is quite soon enough for you to know.' Lucy put her hand upon the girl's wrist. 'Don't you see now what it means to marry Jim ?'

'Yes.'

'You see that there is a good reason why you should not marry him ?'

'I see that there is a good reason why I should.'

'It does not change you ? It has made no difference, this that I have told you ?'

'No, only that I love you more—and him.'

‘It has made no difference ; what I have told her has made no difference !’ Lucy turned away and walked to the other end of the darkened room. ‘I knew it would not, I knew it would be no use.’

Dinah followed her.

‘What is it you say, mother ? Did you think it could make a difference ? Don’t you know that I have loved you from the moment on that evening long ago, when I rose from kneeling beside Aunt Anne, and saw you standing near me sweet and beautiful ? Don’t you know that my love has grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength ? that my thoughts gathered about your son before I saw him, because he was your son ? that my heart went out to him first, because he was your son ? that now that I love him because he is himself, has become part of myself, I still love him, besides and apart from that, and love him in this moment more than ever I have loved him yet, because he

is your son? You have shown me that you, his mother, have suffered, and suffer still; you have shown me that the great outside world that I do not know, that now I never want to know, has heaped upon you cruelty and wrong; you have shown me that now is the time to draw nearer to you yet, and to prove to you, if there is need of proof, that I love you and trust you perfectly.'

'Ah, now is the time!'

Lucy still was half turned away.

'Mother, long ago I made a vow, on that same evening that I spoke of just now, a vow to love you always. It was a child's vow, but I have never forgotten it; it has stayed in my heart, and grown as my heart has grown. I have kept it—very easily; and I shall keep it—always. I think there is nothing through which I would not stand by you, nothing I would not do to help, or save, or comfort you.'

'Nothing? You do not know. Nothing?'

‘ Nothing that I can think or dream of. And that being so, you must see that what you have told me now cannot change in any way my hope to be Jim’s wife.’

‘ No, I see it cannot, I see it has made no change in any way.’

‘ Then there is nothing more to be said : we understand each other now.’

‘ Yes. Dinah leave me now. I want to be alone.’

Dinah went softly away upstairs to her own little room in the roof, and watched from the window there the night’s cloudy birth. Lucy listened till the soft footfalls ceased, then crossed the dusky hall and stole out of the house. By the gate she drew back ; some shrubs grew near it ; she crouched behind them.

Joel Hatherden came along the road and through the gateway ; he paused within it, seeming to feel his wife’s presence ; he called in a low, doubtful voice :

‘ Lucy !’

There was no answer. Joel moved on up the path and entered the house : when the door was closed behind him, Lucy came forth from her hiding-place and passed on into the road.

It was almost night when Lucy Hatherden returned ; she walked with bent head ; the last faint daylight showed the outline of her form, but the night hung about her face and veiled her eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE quiet of night had closed about Little Hollow. In the sky the moon, large, full, and yellow with a harvest glow, rode splendid amidst lightly drifting clouds; the wind, mute amongst the trees, stirred now and again and whispered in the branches, then sank back into silence.

Dinah Hatherden lay wakeful in her bed. The scenes of the past day rose up before her, clear, vivid, persistent; the tale that Lucy had told her repeated itself in her ears; the face of Lucy as she told it looked at her from the moonlit patches on the wall, and from the corners where the darkness crouched; and in the background the figure of Martin Wace stood inefface-

able upon the hillside, and his voice joined in with, and jarred against Lucy's voice. Fevered and restless, Dinah sat up in bed, rose from her bed, went to the window, and looked out on the moonlight night. Very quiet it was, very gentle and peaceful ; very brightly the moonlight streamed down upon the sloping garden, very softly the clouds passed over the moon's face. The peacefulness of the scene calmed the girl's restless mood, and brought relief to her excited brain ; gradually, as she stood there, the haunting visions faded, and other thoughts came, glad and comforting ; as at last she turned again, with lingering feet, towards her bed, she was thinking only of her lover's face, and how next week would bring him back to her. She lay down in bed again and fell asleep.

But sleep, coming first in friendly guise, soon changed, and became a torment ; the haunting thoughts and visions that had been banished for a time, came back again

in dreams, distorted, confused, terrifying. It seemed to Dinah that she wandered through strange rooms and along lonely ways ; and always Lucy seemed to follow her, and always she knew that Martin Wace was near ; and the fear that comes only in dreams was upon her, and the weird, grotesque unrealities of dreams ran riot amidst well-known scenes of daily life. She woke with a start. Her heart was beating wildly ; an intense wakefulness came suddenly after the restless sleep ; her sense of sight and hearing seemed to be preternaturally keen : and yet there was nothing to see, for the small room, with the bar of moonlight stretched across it from the window, looked just as it always looked ; and there was nothing to hear, for silence, complete and ponderous, lay heavy about her and outside the house and over the fields and hills. Dinah started up in bed, then sank back quickly, and lay with eyes that would not close and dared not

look ; the dream horror was upon her still ; she knew not what she feared, yet feared with a nightmare fear. Then the terrors of her childhood rushed back upon her, and the old half-forgotten dreams became real to her once more. Once more the devil had power to draw near in bodily presence ; once more the shadowy form that her childish imagination had shrunk from defining clearly, her vague conception of the Scarlet Woman, seemed to hover about her ; once more the idea recurred, that if she turned her eyes to the tiny window by the door, she would see there a face, pale and ghost-like, looking in upon her. Vainly she tried to drive away her fears ; she could not break the spell that lay upon her : yet gradually waking reason asserted itself against the legacy of sleep, and bit by bit determination grew till it was strong enough to say : I will rise up in bed, I will turn to the window and look.

So Dinah raised herself, and sat up, and with a quicker beating of the heart, turned her head towards the little window by the door. Then the great silence of the night was broken by a cry, low and quivering. The dream fear had become reality ; the waking horror of this strange night transcended the horror of sleep ; in one minute all the fears, all the superstitions, all the visions that had ever tortured Dinah's mind and made her childish nights a suffering, seemed to be drawn together, and proved to be things not of fancy but of substance. For at the little window, lighted faintly by the moon's faint light, a face looked in upon the room, a face pale and ghost-like, pressed close against the panes, with eyes that seemed to the terror-stricken eyes of the girl to look towards her bed.

The broken silence closed again ; after the one cry, Dinah sat motionless and dumb. The face moved from the window ; there came a low tap at the door.

Then Dinah knew that the face was not a ghost face ; now that she saw it no longer, she knew it for what it was ; and now that the superstitious horror was swept away, a sense of near calamity, real and powerful, rose up within her—she felt that she was close to something that must be met and battled with. She rose, went to the door, and opened it ; outside on the landing, almost hidden in the darkness, stood Lucy Hatherden. Dinah said : ‘ Come in ; ’ and Lucy entered the room.

Lucy went over to the bed, half crouched, half kneeled beside it, and lowered her head between her hands ; Dinah followed her and sat on the bedside near her ; the strip of moonlight passed over the figure on the floor, and touched one fold of Dinah’s garment, whitening still more its whiteness.

The girl bent her head and said :

‘ Why have you come ? ’

Lucy answered without moving.

‘I have not told you all.’

‘What more have you to tell?’

Lucy looked up and clasped her hands about the girl’s knees.

‘Do you truly love me?’

‘I love you, mother.’

Lucy bent down again, and waited a little before she spoke: Dinah sat quite still.

‘I did not tell you this afternoon,’ Lucy began, ‘anything about Janet Wace. I thought perhaps I might not have to speak of her, if after what I told you then, you had not still wished to marry Jim; but now——’

‘Don’t you want me to marry him?’ said Dinah; ‘do you mean that you *wanted* me to change?’

‘I hardly know what I want. Hear me, and judge then. When I first married,’ Lucy went on, ‘we lived for a time in London. I had been married five months

when I went to Raynfold for the first time, and then, for the first time, I saw Janet Wace. She was a sort of housekeeper; she said she was a widow, and my husband told me she was a widow; she had one child, a boy, who lived in the village. I did not notice her at first; it was some time before I understood that she hated me.'

‘Why should she hate you?’

‘Never mind; it does not matter now why; but she did hate me, and she watched me; not in a way that I could openly complain of, but constantly. I told you I was fond of admiration, and I was high-spirited when I was young, and I think she hoped, and my husband hoped—but that does not matter; her watching came to nothing—then. But it went on—all my married life; I think she thought that if she watched long enough and close enough she would be able to harm me at last. She was right; the chance came.’

Lucy paused; the bar of moonlight, moving as the moon moved, fell now more directly upon Dinah, less fully on the crouching figure beside her.

‘At the time of my husband’s death,’ the low voice went on, ‘Janet Wace was ill—or said she was ill; for a week before it she had not left her room; for a week after it she kept in bed. I have told you how it happened, his death; I have told you that when he lay there on the floor, I stood in a panic of horror and fear, and did not call or go for help at once. But I did not tell you’—Lucy’s voice rose and sank away again—‘I did not tell you what happened while I stood there, dazed and terrified.’

‘Must you tell me, mother?’

‘I must. Dinah, the moon is very bright to-night, brighter than it has ever been here, away amongst the hills.’

‘Not brighter, I think, than the full moon always is when the sky is clear.’

‘ Yes, much brighter ; only once before I have seen it bright like this—when I was shut up alone, that time they judged me ; it streamed in upon me one night, and it was bright like this. It frightens me when it is so bright, and yet—I think the dusk—it is not so bad as the dusk. It was in the dusk that it happened ; it was in the dusk that I stood and looked at him lying before me, and knew that he was dead ; it was in the dusk that I raised my eyes to the mirror on the wall that faced me, and saw my own face, and did not know it for my face, and saw—— The door was behind me as I stood, the mirror was in front ; as I looked in the mirror, I saw that the door was open ; not much, hardly more than a foot’s space. From that space mirrored eyes met my eyes ; for one instant the face of Janet Wace looked in upon me. It was gone at once, but I knew it had been there ; though I tried to cheat myself and think it had been fancy, I knew in my

heart that what I had seen was real, and I knew that I was in her power at last.'

'But how? She could not harm you.'

'Yes, she could harm me. I feared her then, hardly knowing why; not knowing what they would say, not dreaming they would think—what I told you this afternoon. Afterwards, when I knew, then I knew too that the look on her face had meant: I will bear witness against you.'

'But she could not—false witness?'

'Would she care? she had striven so long against me. Well, she was not called as a witness. Each new face that came to condemn me, I thought would be her face; each time when the little break came in the long tale against me, I said—It will be now. But she never came; her illness, her having had nothing to do with the household at the time, her knowing nothing of the circumstances, was the reason she was not called amongst the

other servants. It was then, when I found that the witnessing was over and that she had not come forward against me, it was then that I began to think I had been mistaken after all, and that the face I had seen was only a fancied face ; and then when I knew I was to be free——’

‘ But you could not have really feared ; you must have known that the truth would be shown at last.’

‘ There was so much that went hard against me ; the doctors — but still they could not be quite sure ; and so they let me go. At first I could not believe that I was free, because of the horror that had fallen upon me ; but by-and-by I began to feel that it was true ; and then the evil came. Dinah, what is that rustling—quite near, coming nearer ?’

‘ It is only the wind, mother, rustling the trees.’

‘ Only the wind ? It sounded like the

rustling of a dress, like the rustling that made me look round that evening. I was sitting alone ; the light was beginning to fail ; I was thinking that I would go abroad for a time, and travel, and drive away the scenes of the last few weeks with new scenes ; and then I heard a rustling behind me, and I looked round, and there was Janet Wace. I had not seen her since that evening when I had seen only her mirrored face ; she stood there and spoke to me ; and the terror that I had thought was past, closed in upon me again. She said that she had meant to come forward and witness against me, that she had meant to say she had seen me take the gun from the table, seen me——’

Lucy Hatherden broke off with a long sigh : Dinah’s face, distinct in the moonlight, was pale as death.

‘ How could she say it ? how could she think of such a thing ? if—she had not seen it ? ’ she whispered.

‘How could she? Dinah, you do not—
Dinah?’

The hidden face was raised an instant; the eyes looked wildly at the frightened eyes above.

‘No, no, oh, mother, no; I believe, will always believe you—innocent.’

‘Yes, I am innocent, I never did it. Don’t you see that I must have known that if I did a thing like that, they would kill me too? And I—you know how I fear death, how the thought of it—oh, you must see that I could never have done it!’

‘I believe in you. Go on, and tell me what she said.’

‘She said that she had meant at first to destroy me, and that she had spared me only because she knew my life would be of advantage to her and her son. My son would be rich; her son was penniless; my death would leave him penniless for ever. My husband by a will made at the time of our marriage—a will which he had often

threatened to alter, but which had not been altered—left to me a sum of money which brought me in about four hundred and fifty pounds a year; of that sum I was to pay her two hundred and fifty a year, and then her son could be as well educated as mine, she said, and made into a gentleman. I was to sign a paper agreeing to make the payment; if I refused, she would speak out, as she called it; and if I failed to pay the money at any time, or if I went out of England, or if I moved from one place to another without letting her know where I was, she would speak out.'

'And you signed the paper?'

'I signed the paper. How could I do otherwise? how could I face the fear again, with the odds, so against me before, doubly against me now? I could not; I signed the paper; I have lived in bondage, in dread, ever since.'

There was a space of utter stillness; the wind at rest amongst the trees stirred not a

single leaf; the silence of the night was unbroken by any sound outside, or any movement within the room.

Dinah spoke at last.

‘Martin Wace is her son.’

‘Yes.’

‘And he knows.’

‘Yes.’

‘And you fear him.’

‘Yes.’

Again the silence : in Dinah’s heart long years passed by in those still moments : when she spoke again, the world was no longer as the world she had lived in hitherto.

‘Why does he want to marry me?’ she asked.

‘He says he loves you.’

‘He said so.’ Dinah shivered. ‘But I mean—apart from that?’

Lucy’s face was hidden amongst the bed-clothes ; her smothered voice was hardly audible.

‘The money, all I have, I must give to him.’

‘Give it to him, give him all he asks; only let him go away.’

Then Lucy rose up and threw out her arms.

‘How can I give it to him? I could not hide from my husband or my son what I had done. There is only one way—to give it to you as my gift when you marry.’

‘To give — me? Mother, give the money and not me! Tell father what you have told me now, tell Jim; we will stand by you, all of us; we will shield you and believe in you.’

‘I cannot do it; it would be useless to do it; if you will not do as he has said, he will proclaim it to all the world, the wicked lie that has tortured me so long. He would not take the money; he would not take it now without you; he told me so this evening; there is no way but the one way to save me.’

Then Dinah too rose, and stood in the moonlight; but her arms hung by her sides; her voice, unlike Lucy's voice, was quiet and firm.

‘I will not do it, I will not carry on the lie, I will not give myself to this bad man, I will not desert and wound the man I love. I will stand by you as I said, I will believe in you and love you; and our God is a righteous God; you need not be afraid; He will prove the right.’

‘Dinah, the proof would be so strong. What do men care for God or for the right? Dinah, you told me you had made a vow — that you loved me — that you would save me——’

‘I love you; I would save you if I could; and you will be saved. Only be brave; you will be safe in your own innocence.’

‘I am selfish, a coward and selfish, but you do not know the terror of it, the

helplessness, the crowd of faces, the horrible death. Had I been brave I would have killed myself ; but I am not brave, and I have no help but you.'

Dinah answered again, in the same voice as before :

'I will not do it ; I must be true to something in myself ; I will not marry this man.'

Lucy sank down upon the floor again, and laid her head at the girl's feet, and clasped her hands about them.

'Dinah, Dinah, you do not know ! Have you no pity ? Will you not think of it—give me time ?'

There was a pause, and then Dinah said once more :

'I cannot do it.'

Lucy rose to her feet, and for awhile the woman and the girl stood silent, their dim faces confronting one another ; then Dinah went slowly to the door, and opened it, and held it open. She did not speak,

and Lucy did not speak ; silently the woman passed out through the doorway on to the little landing ; and Dinah closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALL through the long day a heavy silence hung about Little Hollow. Lucy and Dinah, going about their ordinary tasks, said now and again to each other ordinary words, that seemed to them, as they spoke and heard, to bear another sound, another sense, than the sense and sound they usually bore. It was only very seldom, only when necessary, that the words were spoken; but every sentence that Lucy said seemed to carry within it the plea: Will you not save me? and in each speech that Dinah made, her voice seemed to answer back: I will not do it. The day was very sultry, the heavy air hardly stirred, the languid clouds

hung irresolute ; foreboding seemed to fill the valley and lie upon the hills.

Joel Hatherden came home earlier than usual.

‘There’s not much doing to-day,’ he said, ‘and it’s melting close over there in Barhaven ; so I thought I’d come home and put a clean shirt on, and go and see Anne ; it’s some time gone by since I went and sat with her a bit. Will you come with me, Lucy ?’

‘No, Joel, not to-day. And yet—I will walk with you a little way.’

The husband and wife set out in silence, going slowly up the little rising piece of road towards the fields.

‘It’s terribly close,’ remarked Joel presently, pausing to draw a deep breath.

‘Yes, it’s close, and it’s—Joel, it’s as if all the gloom and the misery in the world was about Sleepy Dale this evening, and was pressing us down.’

‘It’s the electricity in the air,’ said Joel.

‘There’s thunder about, I’ll be bound, and that’s what makes you feel so.’

‘It’s like the feeling before the Last Day,’ Lucy went on ; ‘it’s like this the sky will be, and the air with no wind in it, and everything looking dead and still, when the trumpet will be heard, and the people will cry to the hills to fall on them. I shan’t cry to the hills, Joel.’

‘No, no, you and I’ll be lying over yonder, side by side, in one grave, and please the Lord we’ll rise up hand in hand, and stand waiting, fearing nought.’

Lucy made a little scornful sound, that was half a laugh.

‘I shan’t cry to the hills,’ she repeated ; ‘it wouldn’t be any good. The hills can’t hear, the hills couldn’t fall ; there’s nothing will hide you away from judgment.’

‘Lucy, what is it ? There’s something ails you, surely, to-night ?’

‘What is it ? How can I tell ? It’s the thunder, perhaps, as you say, or per-

haps a presentiment that evil lies before me. I cannot tell you ; you must wait and see—whether the evil's real, or whether it's the thunder.'

Lucy looked straight before her as she spoke : Joel glanced at her sideways, and went on without further speech. On through the fields they went, where the stubble lay yellow and bare, or the autumn grass was coarsening ; then down into the dip that sheltered Sleepy Dale, on through the village, and past the school-house and the church. When the road lay lonely again before them, and no roofs rose against the lowering sky, Lucy stopped and said :

‘ I will leave you here.’

‘ You will not come on and see Anne ?’

‘ No, oh no ; I could not see Anne now.’

Lucy stood silent a moment, and then spoke again.

‘ Joel !’

‘ Yes.’ The man with his gentle, half-

anxious face, waited a little. ‘Yes. What is it, dear?’

‘Joel, the road we have walked, the way we have come to-night, it was the first walk we ever took together.’

‘I know, Lucy; there’s no need to mind me of it.’

‘You remember it? How we walked, saying nothing, as we have walked nearly all the way to-night?’

‘I remember it all very well.’

‘I felt that you had saved me then; I knew I ought to have let you go; and yet—I could not let you go.’

‘I had something to say to it too; I would not go.’

‘If I had loved you then, I think I would not have clung to you. Do you remember that night, before I yielded, while I still struggled, though I knew I should yield at the last, do you remember that I told you then I did not love you?’

‘I remember well.’

‘Do you remember how, when we had reached the gate of Little Hollow, and stood there close together, and the night seemed to shut us away from the world, how I said to you that I took your love and your life to stand as a shield between my past and me?’

‘I remember it; I remember all that you said that night, and the sound that was in your voice.’

‘Joel, if I had loved you then, if I had but loved you then, I might, coward and selfish as I am, I might have let you go!’

‘I thank God, dear, you did not love me then. And I’ve never looked for it; I’m no gentleman, and you’re a lady born; only there was nobody else to take your part.’

Lucy’s head dropped forward on her breast, and a faint colour stole into her cheeks.

‘Joel,’ she said, ‘Joel, I have something to tell you to-night. Through all these

years that my life has been your life, I have learned to love and reverence you as I have never loved or revered a man before ; and now, just at the last, I know it.'

The man, standing listening in the dawn-dusk, began to tremble.

'Don't pretend,' he said, 'don't pretend that you love me ; I've never looked for it ; don't pretend.'

'I don't pretend ; it's true, Joel, it's true. I couldn't bear you to despise me now, I couldn't bear to see your face turned away from me, and to know you thought—Joel, I would do anything, give anything to keep the love, the sort of worship you have given me all these years.'

'Have I worshipped you? I've tried not, and yet I know you've come near to being a graven image to me many a time.'

In the silence that fell upon the man and the woman as they stood, the low sky seemed to sink lower still ; the dusk rose up to meet it. Then a dog barked in the

village behind them, and Joel started and said :

‘ I must go on, or I shall be too late to see Anne.’

‘ Yes, and I must go back.’

Joel lingered yet, made a step forward, and stopped again.

‘ So you are truly my wife,’ he said, ‘ at the last ?’

‘ At the last.’

‘ And for always now ?’

Lucy, looking at him, smiled faintly; but she did not answer. But Joel took the smile for answer, and walked on towards Anne Hatherden’s with great contentment at his heart. And Lucy, when she had watched him for awhile, turned and walked back alone to Little Hollow.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Lucy drew near to Little Hollow she saw in the dusk a figure come out of the garden-gate and take its way towards the hill: she knew the figure for Dinah's, and she waited for a minute or two and then followed it afar off. Dinah went slowly, and every now and again she stopped and waited awhile; and when she waited, Lucy waited too, and when she moved on, Lucy followed her again. Up and up, gradually, towards the sky; there was no light beyond the hill this evening; only thick, slowly drifting clouds, that seemed to weigh upon the long line of its summit and shut the valley from the outer

world. Dinah reached the top, and stood like a small dark cloud against the clouds beyond ; the upright shadow following in her steps stopped too, crept on a few paces, and drew back again. But Dinah never turned her head, never looked back : presently she went on over the brow of the hill, and bearing towards the right, down into a deep narrow valley. The valley led back to Little Hollow, and Dinah followed its winding course, still with lingering, pausing steps ; and still she never looked back, and still the woman stealing after her, paused when she paused, and moved no faster than she moved. But there came a place where the path took a deep curve round a piece of rising ground, and when Dinah reached the curve, Lucy ceased to follow her ; she took her way instead up the hillside and crossed the neck of higher ground. On the further side of it, in the valley, was a clump of trees and bushes ; it stood by the path along which Dinah

must pass ; Lucy soon reached it, and waited amongst the trees.

Dinah came round the curve towards the clump, and when she had reached it, she paused once more and waited. Her back was towards the trees, her arms hung by her side, she stood quite still and did not turn her head. Lucy crept forward, pace by pace, and stood at the edge of her shelter and peered forth through the bushes. Once she drew the bushes apart, and her pale face looked out quite close to Dinah as she stood, and once her mouth quivered, and the girl's name was on her lips, but died away half uttered ; and all the time Dinah stood quite still, and did not turn her head. Only once she stirred slightly ; it was when Lucy, moving amongst the bushes, caused a faint rustling. Then a little trembling went through Dinah's form, and presently she walked on again, and did not pause in her walking till she had reached the garden gate of Little Hollow. Lucy waited till

she had covered a certain distance, and then followed her, afar off, as before.

But at the garden gate Dinah stopped, and presently she turned and looked back along the way by which she had come ; and in the thickening dusk she saw a dim figure drawing near, and she waited till it was quite close. When the figure was near the gate it stopped, and then Dinah spoke.

‘ You were there then ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ You followed me all the time ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ You stood behind me in the clump of trees ? You were very near me then ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ I knew it. I felt that you were there.’

‘ And yet ’ — the figure drew nearer —
‘ and yet you would not turn and look.’

‘ I would not turn ; because I felt that you were there, following me as you followed me in my dream, I would not turn and look.’

‘ You would not heed me ?’

‘ I knew what you wanted, I knew why you came stealing, creeping after me.’

The girl’s voice was rising ; suddenly she broke out into passionate words.

‘ My love and my youth are my own ; you shall not have them : my life is my own life ; you shall not drag it away and blight it with yours. Why have you come into my world with your darkness and your misery ? I will not have them, I will not bear your burden, I will not kill my love and youth and hope.’

‘ If you loved——’

‘ I have loved you, I will love you again, I have told you I would stand by you to the end. But not with a lie, I will not bind myself with a lie ; and for Jim’s sake, whom I love, whom I must love more than all——’

Lucy broke in upon her.

‘ Yes, for Jim’s sake, for Jim’s sake more than all.’

‘For Jim’s sake,’ Dinah hurried on, ‘I will be true to him. We love each other, he and I; you shall not come with the horrible misery of your lie and crush the love out of our lives.’

‘Dinah, listen——’

‘I will not listen.’ The girl, half turned away, waved her hands towards the woman as though to drive her back. ‘I will not listen.’

She walked quickly up the path and into the house. Lucy did not follow her; she gave a swift glance around at the familiar landscape, blurred and almost hidden now.

‘Only to-night!’ she said, ‘one more night, and then it comes. I must do it, and there is only to-night.’

CHAPTER XX.

IN the night, when the darkness was fully come, the clouds began to break and drift apart; gradually the sky grew clearer and the stars came forth, and a quickening freshness spread itself through the sultry air. When Dinah went up to bed, the earth was dark, but in the sky was the faint light that tells that the moon, unseen as yet, is soon to rise.

Dinah opened the window, drew a chair close to it, and sitting down, leaned her head upon her hand, and looked out at the stars. They shone unclouded now, and the deep sky beyond was dark, not with darkness of the night, but with the clear darkness of space stretching beyond space, and

out of an immensity of nothingness making a thick wall, unbroken and impenetrable.

Dinah, looking at it, said to herself : ‘ What does it hide ? Is it God ? and can He with His God-eyes see me so far below, sitting here alone ? It is so far away ! If He were nearer, I could trust Him more ; or if the sky would open just a little, and let me get one glimpse, perhaps I could bear it better, know better, see better, understand a little what it all means.’

The moon rose slowly, creeping up the sky, and the night grew colder. Dinah took a shawl from the cupboard and wrapped it round her shoulders, then once more sat down by the window and watched the silent night go by. As it passed, the chill air grew chiller yet ; later on the clouds returned, and spread themselves about the sky, and a few drops of rain, heavy and threatening, splashed down upon the expectant trees.

The darkest hour of the night had come ; the darkness drew together its best strength to await and drive back the coming dawn ; the morrow trampled on the memory of the past dead day. The moon was hidden now, but its light came faintly through the thickening clouds, and rested with uncertain touch on the trees and the fields and the garden of Little Hollow. It was then, sitting motionless by the open window, that Dinah heard the sound of a door gently opened below, and then a footfall on the gravel path. The footfall paused beneath her window, and a whisper rose up towards her. She heard no words distinctly said, but leaned forward and looked down, and saw a shadowy form and a dim, upturned face, and knew them for the form and face of Lucy Hatherden.

Then Dinah knew that she had been expecting all the night to see Lucy standing there, and knew, too, that the strange dream-life she had lived for the last twenty-

four hours would soon be at an end ; the awakening was near at hand ; it was time to meet what it would bring. She whispered back : ‘ I am ready, I will come.’ Then she drew her shawl more tightly about her, and stepped back into the little dark room, and gave a glance all round it, loving it in its darkness with something of a yearning in her heart, as though she saw it for the last time. She stole down the staircase, past the room where Joel Hatherden lay asleep, then on downstairs again, down the passage that ran along at the back of the house, and out by the unlocked door.

Lucy stood just without ; she moved on cautiously as Dinah drew near, and Dinah followed her, round to the front of the house, down the path and out through the garden gate. Then quickly, without a word, the two walked on, side by side now, along the road towards the hill. They did not speak as they climbed its

sloping side, they did not speak when they had reached its summit and stood where Lucy had stood when she had spoken to Joel for the first time. For a time they did not speak; they faced each other in silence; below lay the valley and the town and the sea, dim, undefined in the faint light of the clouded moon; and they themselves, like shadows, stood half concealed in the shelter of the night. At last Lucy spoke.

‘There is only to-night. I have no choice.’

Dinah answered:

‘I will listen now.’

‘We are quite alone,’ Lucy said; ‘nobody to speak but me, nobody to hear but you.’

Dinah answered:

‘Nobody but me. Speak now, while the night still lasts; I will listen now.’

Then Lucy spoke. Standing before Dinah, her voice disturbed the silence that slept upon the hill in one last great appeal;

her spirit, naked in its fear, spoke to Dinah's spirit ; her soul begged for mercy from a fellow-soul. And Dinah listened. As she listened, the hope of her youth died within her, her heart grew cramped and cold, and the love that had been her life went far away and looked at her from out a distant heaven, into which she knew she could enter nevermore. It was true, the presentiment she had had as she turned away from her window ; the dream-life was truly over, the awakening had come ; reality stood before her and pointed to one only path.

But Dinah, listening, said no word till Lucy had ceased to speak ; then she answered her.

‘I will do it,’ she said ; ‘I will save you.’

It seemed very dark now ; the clouds were very thick, the moonlight very pale ; the night seemed to draw itself together, and struggling for existence, to lie upon and

cling to the hills. But looking towards the east, Dinah saw a faint line of light arise in the far horizon ; it grew and stretched and broadened ; and then, slowly, the dawn broke over the sea.

Book III.

ANNE.

The waters are come in, even unto my soul . . . I am
come into deep waters, so that the floods run over me.—
PSALM lxix.

CHAPTER I.

A WILD autumn followed the long summer ; October came with a rush of clouds and rain ; the days were stormy and wet.

Anne Hatherden was not well this autumn ; a sharp attack of rheumatism had kept her in bed for several days, and for two or three weeks she was unable to leave the house. She sat in her little sitting-room, her eyes looking out at the unquiet sea, while her hands knitted ; and she said to herself that it was like the life of the world, troubled and restless, and that only the eye of Christian faith could pierce to the calm land that lay beyond. Yet the thought of the land beyond was not the one on which she cared most to dwell ;

the vengeance of the Lord, the overthrow of the ungodly, these were the subjects that pleased her spirit best; and her Bible, lying by her side, lay always open at a page which bore upon it some prophecy of retribution, some denunciation of sin. If only she could have been sure that on the Day of Judgment Joel Hatherden would stand beside her among the saved, the thought of that day, when the Lord would vindicate His name; when men would see that she, Anne Hatherden, had been right to lead the stern life she had led, to scorn pleasure as she had scorned it, to speak plainly as she had spoken, to search the Scriptures as she had searched them; and when all Sleepy Dale would recognise at last that pleasure and beauty and fine dressing were altogether vanity; if only she could have been sure that Joel would be safe, and could have hoped, moreover, that Dinah also might stand upon the outskirts of the chosen, the thought of the Last Day would have

been a thought made up of triumph and of longing. But there was always the fear that her brother's soul might perish at the last ; and the fear shadowed her life, chilled her heart, embittered her anticipations of the overthrow of the ungodly, and went hand in hand with a never-dying distrust and dislike of the woman who was his wife.

Her own soul was safe ; grace had been given to her, and she had worked out her salvation, if not in fear and trembling, yet in rigid self-repression ; but if her brother's soul, the soul of the one human being for whom she felt a warm human love, strong enough, passionate enough to rival sometimes her sense of duty to the Lord, if this soul should perish at the last, there would perish with it something that she dared not name. Anne Hatherden's religion would not let her think a blasphemous thought ; but she knew in her heart of hearts that the glories

of heaven would pale for her if Joel were in hell, that the golden streets would be dulled if Joel did not tread them by her side, that the songs of praise would lack in sweetness and in triumph if Joel's quavering voice did not help to swell their strains. So, as she sat and looked out at the sea, the thought of her brother's soul was a thought that darkened her visions of a future life; and always she saw Lucy Hatherden standing between Joel and his salvation.

On a cloudy afternoon Churchwarden Hargreaves sat with Anne Hatherden in her little parlour and talked to her of the nothingness of life, and by-and-by, being cheered by a cup of tea, of Dinah's approaching wedding.

‘You're glad, I suppose,’ he said, ‘that she didn't marry the other young man? You've never taken to Mrs. Joel, I fancy, not being one to change, in spite of time working wonders, as they say; and you

wouldn't have cared for any further connection with the family.'

Aunt Anne turned her face from the leaden sea outside, towards the little round table, with its white cloth and teacups and bread-and-butter, and the broad, sallow face of the churchwarden on the further side.

'No, I'm not one to change,' she said; 'chopping and changing's for those that makes up their minds with nothing to go upon. Still, I don't say that sons is answerable for their mothers, and the young man's a young man I took a kind of liking to.'

'Well, Dinah seems a bit changeable anyway,' said Mr. Hargreaves, 'and I don't know where she gets it from, seeing her father never was that way, nor you, nor any of the family.'

'She gets it from her bringing up, that's where she gets it from. Her stepmother's got an unsettled way with her, and the girl's caught it.'

‘Girls are often fickle by nature, though. *K*
There was a girl I came across when I
was quite a young man; Maria her name
was——’

‘Yes, you’ve told me about her before,’
interrupted Aunt Anne, ‘and a good thing
it was for you, churchwarden, that the
Lord moved her to jilt you. Still I don’t
hold with fickleness; I’m not one for
earthly love, as you know, but if a girl says
yes to a man, she ought to hold to him—
unless for conscience’ sake.’

‘Well, it’s all for the best, I suppose,’
said the churchwarden. ‘And he seems a
likely young man, quiet and Christian
behaved, so far as one can see.’

Aunt Anne shook her head.

‘I don’t take to him. He wears
one of them tall hats—weekdays and
all.’

‘It’s the custom in London, I fancy,
among a good many.’

‘I don’t know that that makes it any

better ; London customs isn't always Bible customs by all I hear. Not that I'd say anything if it was only on a Sunday ; my father wore a hat like that when he went to church, and it has a respectable look on the Lord's day ; but weekdays——'

'Well, perhaps it's rather proud looking for weekdays,' admitted the churchwarden.

'I was always one to go by headgear, as you know,' Aunt Anne went on ; 'what's outside a head, shows what's in it, to my way of thinking.'

'You don't take to him, then ?'

'No, I don't take to him, but my opinion's of no account now at Little Hollow. Things is changed there since my time, churchwarden ; it used to be held right to see what people's minds and hearts was like ; but now it's marrying and giving in marriage, and no care for the soul, or whether those they marry are Christians or no Christians.'

‘If I’d thought he wasn’t a Christian——’ began Mr. Hargreaves.

‘I don’t say he isn’t,’ interrupted Aunt Anne, ‘I only say the outward signs don’t hold with it; and I’d have liked better if I’d known more about him. I don’t trust people coming as strangers, with nothing to show what they’re like; and Dinah’s the only child, and her mother was a good woman, and she ought to have had a husband that’d guide her in the right way.’

‘I was about to say,’ said Mr. Hargreaves, ‘that if I’d thought he wasn’t a Christian, I’d have made a few inquiries. My brother-in-law—him that’s father to my nephew in the law, he knows him a bit, I fancy, for he said in his last letter—and that’s a month or two gone by—I hear, says he, that young Wace has been down in your parts, and what do they think of him there? or something of the sort—I can’t exactly remember. I’m not much of a

correspondent, and I've never answered the letter yet; but if I'd thought about it, I might have made a few inquiries.'

'A month or two gone by? That'll be when he first came here?'

'Yes, about then; but not knowing what was going to happen at the time you see, I didn't take so much interest. But now—well, for the matter of that, I suppose I might make a few inquiries yet.'

'I suppose so.'

'I'll do it,' said the churchwarden, getting up; 'if there's anything to be found out about anybody, it's always best to find it out. And, as you say, there's something about him not to be depended on.'

'I know nothing against him,' said Aunt Anne, 'except his outward appearance.'

'Ah, but the hat doesn't look well; it's as you say, the hat's against him.'

The churchwarden bustled away, and Aunt Anne, left alone, looked out again at the sombre sea.

‘ Marrying and giving in marriage !’ she was thinking, ‘ it’s all they give their minds to, that and pleasuring and vanities. And so it was in the days of the Flood, and so it was in Sodom and Gomorrha ; and the wrath of the Lord came upon them and destroyed them all.’

CHAPTER II.

THE time of Dinah's wedding was drawing near. All the valley seemed to mourn its approach : the leaves lay dead beneath the trees, and the branches wailed over them : the sea took a grayer tone, the wind had a more desolate sound than in any autumn Dinah had ever known. The heavy days passed all too swiftly ; the wind seemed to sweep the short time along with it as it whirled and blustered about Little Hollow, and the dreaded month of December drew near with giant steps.

To Lucy Hatherden the time was one of feverish unrest ; sometimes she looked on with passionate longing to the day that would bring her safety ; sometimes she

called upon God to hold the days as they came and forbid them to pass on. And always in the night the wind spoke to her through long, wakeful hours, and Dinah's voice called to her through its wailing; and sometimes it seemed as though she must answer the voice and bid it cease with words that would hush the pain in it. But when the wind's voice died into low breathings, and wandered wearily around the house, or lingered sighing at her window, it whispered to her of death; and fear awoke in her heart and answered it, and the two voices together made her dumb.

Every day she took long walks, as in the days before she had married Joel, and her favourite walk was the desolate stretch of beach beyond Love's End Point. Again and again she paced there to and fro and watched the tide come in; and again and again she waited till the waves had reached the rocks before, with hurried steps, she

returned to the safety that lay on the other side of the point.

One evening, when the gale, tired with its own raging, was quiet for a time, Lucy came back along the beach from Love's End Point. It was nearly dark, but she could still see the long line of the waves as they broke, and the onward motion of the torn, ragged mass of clouds overhead. Before her the beach stretched desolate; the fishermen's huts ahead were hidden in the gloom; only Anne Hatherden's cottage, standing solitary near the shore, broke the loneliness of the scene. It stood like a square, dark blot, the smoke from its chimney barely visible as it rose in a slanting course towards the clouds. No light showed from the side that faced Lucy as she came along the shore, but when she was close to the cottage and had passed round to the front of it, she saw the flickering light of firelight through the window by the door. All about her the dark, blank

night was growing, and amidst the dreariness around, the moving, leaping light had a friendly, beckoning look. Lucy drew nearer to it, paused, and drew nearer still, and so, bit by bit, advanced till she was quite close to the window. She stood on tiptoe and looked in. At first she thought the room was empty; but presently, in a part of the room which the firelight hardly touched, she saw Anne Hatherden. Anne was kneeling by the table; the starting light came and went upon the open Bible by her side; her hands were clasped, her face was turned upwards; Lucy, listening, could hear that every now and again she spoke aloud. She could not hear the words that Anne said, but instinctively she seemed to know that Anne was praying for Joel, praying for a salvation that meant loneliness to the woman standing outside in the darkness, praying that his love for her might pass away; and as she waited the love and pain and bitterness in Lucy's

heart grew strong and fierce, and suddenly she left the window and went to the door and opened it, and stood on the threshold, and spoke out something of the passion and misery within her.

‘I love him,’ she said, ‘I love him in a way that you can never know. What right have you to kneel before God, and say that you love him best? What right have you to ask that the only thing I have should be taken from me? Only now, at the last, I know what it means to me, only now’—she came forward into the room, close to the tall figure that had risen to its feet; she put out a hand and laid it on Anne’s arm. ‘Don’t pray to God,’ she said in a voice in which the passion was lost in pleading, ‘don’t pray to Him to take Joel’s love from me! I have done so much, given so much, to keep it; don’t, for the God’s sake who listens to you, don’t ask that it may be taken away from me!’

Anne Hatherden took the clutching hand from her arm before she answered.

‘Your words are idle,’ she said. ‘I do not know why you should come here now to speak to me of a love that, as you say truly, I can never know. My love is different from yours; it does not think of the body, it does not ask to be seen and known and rewarded here; it looks further, it will last longer. I must ask the Lord what such a love bids me ask; and the Lord Himself will judge between your love and mine.’

The excitement died out of Lucy’s face as she listened to Anne’s stern voice, and she turned away as Anne ceased to speak.

‘It is true,’ she said; ‘God will judge; there is no escape at the end—only the end is not, cannot be yet. But still’—Lucy turned once more—‘I will tell you this, that I who fear death so much, would give my life because of the love that you despise.’

‘Life is a little thing to give,’ said Anne, ‘a little thing, and easily given.’

‘To me it would be hard. As for you, you have never really lived, you have cut yourself off from all that makes life sweet, you have never known love—or fear.’

‘I have chosen the better part.’

‘And I the worse; but you do not know how the world has been to me. If I had been born here, as you were born, I might have chosen—I cannot tell——’

‘You were born as the Lord thought good; and the Lord, when He gave you life, gave you the power to choose between good and evil.’

‘Perhaps; I have never understood these things. But I have learned to reverence a man who has been kinder to me than God has been: God turned his face away from me, but Joel pitied me in my loneliness; God would not hear me when I asked Him for a sign, but Joel——’

‘God knows your heart,’ broke in Anne;

‘Joel has been always blinded by his earthly love.’

‘Then let it blind him still. It is all I have ; if I lose it now I shall be lost indeed.’

‘Your words are blasphemous words,’ said Anne ; ‘there’s no saving or losing in earthly love.’

The flames, leaping up, showed her face set in hard lines as she spoke, and Lucy, looking at her, felt her heart grow cold. She did not answer Anne’s last words, but turning from her, left the cottage and took her way back to Little Hollow.

By the gate Joel Hatherden was waiting for his wife.

‘At last !’ he said. ‘I began to think you must have lost your way.’

‘I know the way too well.’

‘The way home. It is your home now, indeed ? You want no other ?’

‘No, only this.’

The night was too dark for Joel to see

Lucy's face as she spoke ; nor could she see that on her husband's face was the look of a man who has won his heart's desire.

CHAPTER III.

A WEEK later Anne Hatherden came to Little Hollow. It was a long time since she had been there, and Lucy and Dinah looked up, surprised and startled, as with slow, faltering steps she entered the hall.

‘Aunt Anne! How have you come? You surely have not walked?’

Dinah went forward and led her to a chair by the fireside.

‘Yes, I walked. I had to come, and when the spirit’s willing it can force the flesh to a deal.’

‘You had to come? Why?’ Lucy asked. She spoke hurriedly; everything that happened cast on her now a shadow,

not of itself, but of one constant shape—the shadow of fear.

Aunt Anne glanced at her quickly.

‘Lucy Hatherden, you have not done your duty in the matter of this marriage.’

‘How — my duty? What have I done?’

Dinah came and stood before her step-mother, hiding her from Aunt Anne’s gaze.

‘What do you mean, Aunt Anne?’ she said.

‘I mean this,’ said Aunt Anne, ‘that there was no looking into things when this marriage was settled, no inquiries made, no trouble taken to find out whether the man that was to be your husband, Dinah, was a child of light or a child of the devil.’

‘My father is satisfied,’ said Dinah.

‘Your father’s one that’s satisfied with a ha’porth of satisfaction out of every shilling. He was never one to find out anything, he’ld trust anybody, whether he’d ever seen

them before or not, and take all they said for gospel. No, it's not him I look to, it's you, Lucy Hatherden, you that's set up to be a mother to the girl, you that I'd have thought would have taken some pains to find out whether the man would make her a good husband.'

'There was nothing to find out ; I knew all about him.'

'You knew all about him ? then Satan's made your heart blacker than I thought for. I didn't expect much, I didn't think you'd look for grace, but I thought you'd hold to decency.'

'The man's a decent man, the man I hope, I believe, I know, will make a good husband, will be kind and merciful once he's married.'

'The man's a loose-living, gambling man, the man's a Sabbath-breaker and a scoffer ; married or single you'll pluck no grapes or figs off him—thorns and thistles is all you've got to look for.'

‘What has he done? What do you know of him?’

‘You don’t think much of such things, maybe, you don’t take much account of pleasuring on the Lord’s day, of drunkenness, chambering and wantonness; the children of this world sees things different, I know. But I’m of kin to the child, I’m of her blood, I stood by her mother’s bedside when she was born, I held her in my arms and renounced the pomps and vanities for her; and I won’t stand by and see her given over to evil, and her soul laid out ready for Satan to destroy.’

‘What has he done?’ asked Lucy again.
‘What do you know about him?’

‘He lives a loose life,’ said Aunt Anne.
‘Not worse than hundreds of others you’ll tell me, maybe, and I won’t give you the lie, for the world’s mostly all Babylon nowadays; but he’s not fit to come here and marry into our family, that’s always been used to look to their souls—least-

ways till they took up with strangers ; and I can't but set my face against it.' Aunt Anne put her hand in her pocket and drew forth a letter. ' See here,' she said ; ' this came by the post this morning to Churchwarden Hargreaves. It's from his brother-in-law in London, and he's made a few inquiries, and this is what he says.'

She handed the letter to Lucy, and Lucy read it. When she had read it, she folded it up and stood with it in her hand, clasping it very tightly.

' Did you know all that about him ?' asked Aunt Anne.

' No, I did not know.'

Dinah stretched out her hand.

' Give me the letter,' she said. ' Let me read it.'

But Lucy drew back, and Aunt Anne said : ' No, child, there is no need for you to read it.' She fixed her eyes on the girl's face. ' Dinah,' she said, ' the Lord's calling to you for a sacrifice, and you've got

to give it, as Abraham offered up Isaac. You must give up your sweetheart for conscience' sake.'

Dinah answered with her eyes looking back into Aunt Anne's eyes :

'I cannot give him up ; I must marry him.'

'Not when you know him to be an enemy of the Lord ; not when you know he's a bad man and leads a bad life and cares nothing for the life that is to come.'

'Whatever he is, and does, or has done,' said Dinah, 'I must marry him.'

'Is your heart so set upon him ? Child, come here.' Aunt Anne's voice softened ; she stretched out her hand and drew Dinah towards her. 'Child, I did it once, long ago, I gave up my sweetheart for conscience' sake. It'll hurt you a bit, I know—I remember the hurt ; but the Lord'll heal the place, and it's but a little thing to cast away, when you think of saving the whole of you from hell fire.'

‘I cannot help it,’ Dinah answered brokenly ; ‘God will not be so hard upon me, so cruel—to cast me into hell, because I must—I must marry him.’

‘The Lord is never cruel,’ said Aunt Anne sternly. ‘It’s human creatures that take their own way, and when they have damned themselves they say that God is hard.’

Dinah did not answer. The evening had come, and the light of the flames in the wide fireplace was the chief light in the room. Lucy stood back in the shadow, and still held the letter tightly clasped in her hand. Presently Aunt Anne spoke again.

‘It’s a pity you couldn’t bring yourself to give him up of free will,’ she said, ‘for give him up is what you’ll have to do. He’s a meek man, is Joel, and innocent in his ways, but I never knew him to do wrong or to allow wrong, when he could see clearly that it was wrong ; and when

he's read that letter I've no doubt but what he'll forbid Martin Wace ever to come to Little Hollow again.'

Lucy spoke out of the shadow.

'You think he will not let Dinah marry him?'

'I make no doubt of it; he's obstinate enough when his mind's made up, is Joel.'

'And you think—you are sure he will not let her marry him?'

'It's not a matter of thinking—you can see for yourself. It's plain enough to anyone who cares for the child's soul, or takes no heed, even, of anything but her earthly happiness, it's plain enough there's only one thing to be done.'

Lucy said nothing, and Aunt Anne, after a pause, went on speaking.

'Dinah can't see it now; the earthly love's got into her and made her blind. But Joel 'll see it, as plain as I see it, as plain as even you see it, Lucy Hatherden,

who thinks more of earthly love than heavenly.'

Again Lucy made no answer. Aunt Anne turned towards her.

'You see it plainly—that even looking only to the child's earthly happiness, the thing's impossible?'

Lucy, still standing in the shadow, answered very softly.

'I—hardly know.'

'You hardly know?' Anne Hatherden rose from her chair. 'Do you mean you have any doubt?'

There was a pause, and in the pause the sound of a footstep on the path. Aunt Anne sat down again and said: 'It's Joel.'

CHAPTER IV.

JOEL HATHERDEN entered the house in the same careful way that he had entered it evening after evening for very many years. Inside the hall the three waiting women could hear the scraping of his feet and the stamping on the mat; then came the little pause while he hung up his hat; and then the handle of the door was turned, and he stood in the doorway.

‘Are you there, Lucy?’ he said, ‘and Dinah? It seems dark at first, coming in from outside.’

‘Yes, we are here,’ Lucy answered; ‘and—and Anne is here.’

‘Anne? At this time of night, and with her rheumatism?’

‘There are worse things in the world than rheumatism, brother,’ said Aunt Anne, ‘and harder to master.’

‘I begin to see now,’ said Joel; ‘it seemed quite dark coming in. But we might have a little light, eh, Lucy? It seems cheerless to be sitting in the dark, and not be able to see each others’ faces.’

‘Shall I get the lamp, mother?’ Dinah asked.

‘No, the candles will do just now.’

Lucy herself reached up and took the candles from the mantelpiece, lighted them, and put them back. They stood high up, and cast a feeble light on the faces below, a light that was shifting and unsteady, for there was a draught from the door, and the thin flames flickered as they burned.

‘Well, Anne, I’m glad to see you,’ said Joel, ‘though doubtful how far it’s wise for you to venture so far.’

‘I didn’t come for pleasure,’ answered Aunt Anne; ‘pleasuring’s not my way, as

you know. I've come to open your eyes, and to put the wrong and the right before you.'

Joel glanced round uneasily.

'Well, what is it?' he said, and his voice was a little weary.

'It's to do with Martin Wace and this marriage of Dinah's.'

'With Martin Wace? Do you know about it, Lucy?'

'Anne has just told me.'

Dinah came to her father's side.

'Father, do not listen to Aunt Anne. I must marry him, whatever she says.'

Joel's face was full of perplexity.

'I don't understand,' he said. 'Have you anything against the marriage, Anne?'

'I'm against the marriage, brother, and you'll be against it when you find the man's a bad, loose-living man; you're not what I took you for if you're willing to give your child to a husband that'll treat her badly in this life, maybe, and'll drag

her soul down to perdition with his own.'

'Is he a bad man? How do you know? What has he done?'

'You had better read the letter; it speaks plainer than I can do.'

'What letter?'

'Lucy has it.'

Lucy came slowly to her husband, and gave him the letter; then stood behind his chair. Joel read it, bending forward, so that the firelight fell upon the words and helped the scanty, moving light of the candles. Aunt Anne's eyes and Dinah's eyes were fixed upon his face; the eyes of Lucy, standing behind him, looked downwards. He read the letter slowly to the end, and when he had read it he looked at Aunt Anne.

'If it's true what's written here, you're right,' he said.

'I make no doubt it's true; there are signs I go by that made me distrust him

from the first ; and the man that wrote that letter is a man has no reason to say what isn't true.'

'No, and yet—I wish it wasn't true ; it's bad to find out wickedness.'

'Better to find it out if it's there, than to hide it till it's too late.'

'Yes, it's better ; yes, you're right. Dinah, my child, it's not out of harshness I say it, it's not because it doesn't hurt me to hurt you, but it's for your good, it's for your own sake here and hereafter ; you can't marry this man, Dinah. I must write and tell him he mustn't ever come here again.'

Aunt Anne rose up in triumph.

'Brother, I knew you'd see it plain, I knew you'd hold to the right.'

But Dinah, standing by her father's side, said in the same quiet voice as before :

'I must marry him ; it's no good—you mustn't write to him, you mustn't take any

notice of the letter ; I must marry him, father.'

' I must write to him, Dinah ; if he can prove it isn't true, if he can show there's some mistake, or something looks different to what it is, then I'm not one to draw back from owning I was wrong, and to beg his pardon. But as I see things now, I couldn't let you marry him ; I'm your father, and the Lord when He gave you to me, gave me the duty to guide you right as far as I can judge ; and I judge it'd be against you, body and soul, to marry Martin Wace.'

' It'd be against her, brother ; I knew you'd see it plain. Lucy Hatherden, do you doubt still, you that sets up to hold by Joel and what he says and thinks, do you doubt now ?'

Joel turned towards his wife.

' Lucy loves Dinah almost as I do ; it'll go hard with her to hurt her, I know, but she sees it as I do.'

He reached up his hand towards her, but Lucy did not take the hand : she came round to the side of his chair, and kneeled down ; she hid her face against his knee, and said only :

‘ Joel, Joel !’

Dinah, standing behind her, spoke in a voice that was full of entreaty now.

‘ Father, do not listen to Aunt Anne. It is a mistake, you must not write, you must let me have my way.’

Aunt Anne, her tall figure upright against the firelight, looked down at Lucy’s kneeling form.

‘ What ails your wife ? Does she agree with you, brother, as you said ?’

‘ Yes, she agrees with me. Lucy, look up ! It hurts you, I know, to bruise the child’s heart, but you must see that what I say is right. You see, don’t you, Lucy, that the marriage must not be ?’

‘ Must it not be ? Joel, is your mind quite made up ? Must it not be ?’

‘Surely not. You see, don’t you, that it would bring only misery in the end?’

‘Misery?’ The bowed head was lifted, the wild eyes looked up. ‘Ah, Joel, if you write, if you tell him not to come, it will bring misery.’

‘For a while, only for a while; by-and-by Dinah will see I did what was right.’

Dinah clasped her hands and bent towards Joel.

‘Father, you must let me have my way. You may be right and I wrong, but I will never blame you if misery should come of it, if I should suffer in the end; I will bear it without complaint, without a word. Only listen to me, only let me have my way; if you love me at all, listen to me, and let me have my way!’

Aunt Anne put her hand on the girl’s shoulder.

‘Your father will not heed you; he looks to the good of your soul, and he is right. And it’s not seemly to act and talk

as you do ; no woman should be so set upon a man as you seem set ; you've made an idol of him, and the Lord's worked so as to break it.'

'No, I cannot heed you, Dinah,' said Joel sadly ; 'the right's got to be done. You make it harder, but it's no good to strive against it.'

'No good? And yet once more, father——'

Lucy interrupted the girl as she loosened herself from Aunt Anne's grasp.

'No, it is no good.'

The kneeling form rose up and stood erect in the firelight.

'Dinah, you have done your best, you have been very brave, you have stood by me to the very end ; but it is no good. God is too strong for me, and the justice and the evil must come at last.'

'Lucy !' Joel rose from his chair. 'Lucy, what makes you look and speak like that ?'

‘ Ah, Joel, it was for your sake more than for my own, for your sake, coward though I am, for your sake most, that I took the sacrifice from Dinah here, and did my utmost to let the old life go on. But it has been no good ; God is against me, and you would not heed ; and now you, poor Joel, must suffer with my suffering, and you ’—Lucy turned to Anne—‘ you will triumph at the last.’

Aunt Anne answered in her sternest voice.

‘ Woman, speak out your meaning.’

‘ I mean that Martin Wace is my enemy and the son of my enemy, I mean that when this marriage is broken off, he will use the power he has to drag me back to death.’ Lucy turned with her pale face and her burning eyes to Joel again. ‘ I told you once, I told you, Joel, once, in the days long ago, when we were married first, that I had an enemy. This woman, the mother of Martin Wace, had been my

enemy for years, and at that time, when they tried me for my life, she could have cut my life off with a lie. It was a lie, but it had more look of truth in it than any real truth that I could tell. She came to me and said she would keep silence, if I would buy the silence ; and I bought it. Year after year I have bound myself with a chain that has grown thicker with each payment I have made, year after year I have strengthened her proof against me by my cowardice and helplessness ; and now, if I withstand this man, her son, he will bring forth the lie again, he says, strengthened with the strength that I have given it, and tell it to the world, and bring me back again to the death that was so near before.'

'What does it all mean, Lucy? Tell me ; I cannot understand.'

'I cannot tell you plainer, Joel, than I have told you. I could tell you all the story in its length, I will tell it to you some time—but not now. Now, all you

need know is this, that the old horror that was near me when you knew me first is near me again, that the old disgrace you saved me from hangs over me again, that Martin Wace has the power to bring back the past, and that he will use the power.'

'Let him use it.' Aunt Anne's firm voice spoke after the trembling one. 'Let him use it; if the power he has is rooted in a lie, the Lord will bring him to confusion.'

'Anne is right,' said Joel. 'Lucy, you need not fear; my wife, I will stand by you, as I stood by you before. Trust me, trust us all; we will stand by you; and God is a righteous God.'

But Dinah spoke in a whisper.: 'You do not know. The power he has is a very strong power;' and Lucy echoed her words: 'You do not know.'

'It is for you to tell us,' said Aunt Anne. 'Speak, that we may know what there is to do.'

Then after a little while Lucy, standing with the faint flickering light upon her face, told her tale once more. She told it between two spaces of silence, for before she began to speak there had passed some moments that were very still, and when her voice ceased, silence lay heavy again in the half-lighted room. Joel went over to his wife's side; Dinah stood by the table, and her face was as pale as Lucy's face; Aunt Anne had sat down again by the fire, and she did not stir. It was she who spoke first.

‘Where does she live, this woman? With her son?’

‘Yes,’ Lucy answered, ‘with her son.’

‘I will go to London; to-morrow I will go, and I will find her out, and she shall own to me that what she says is a lie.’

‘You must not go.’ Lucy's voice and Dinah's voice spoke the words together.

‘Yes, I will go. I had no mercy on

you, Lucy Hatherden, that night when you stood up before all the people and pleaded for mercy. You seemed to me then to stand between Joel and his salvation, to be a messenger sent by Satan to tempt his soul away ; and all through the years that you have been his wife I still have seen you as a stumbling-block in his way. I had no mercy on you then, I have no mercy on you now ; but I will give you justice. If you have suffered because of a lie, I will destroy the lie ; I have no fear of Janet Wace or of her son ; to-morrow I will go to London, and the Lord will guide me to the truth.'

Lucy said again, her eyes wide and staring : ' You must not go ' ; and Dinah said : ' No, do not go, it would be useless ; do not go.'

' Anne is right,' said Joel ; ' the truth must be brought to light. You're timid and frightened, but it's the only way. I'd go myself, but Anne was always more

masterful than I was, and she'd have more power with her than I should have.'

'Joel, she must not go.'

'Woman,' said Anne, 'you are foolish with your fears; no harm can come if we do the right; and this is the right.'

'Aunt Anne,' said Dinah, 'listen to me; for my sake, for father's sake, do not go.'

Lucy clasped her hands about her husband's arm, and clinging to him, said once more:

'She must not go.'

'Nay, Lucy,' said Joel, 'Anne is right—you are foolish in your fears; we must get to the truth, and it is the only way.'

Anne Hatherden had risen from her chair, and she moved a few paces towards the door.

'Good - night,' she said, 'good - bye; there's no use in more talking—it's doing is wanted now; to-morrow I go.'

But Lucy came forward and held her by the gown.

‘No, Anne, you must not go, you shall not go. Joel, Joel, do not let her go!’

Joel followed his wife.

‘Why should you fear so? Trust in the truth; the truth——’

She broke in upon him:

‘Hush, hush!’ Her face, half turned away from him, was pallid and changed; her eyes, looking at him sideways, were filled with an agony of horror and of fear; her voice was low and hoarse and whispering. ‘Hush!’ She raised her hand as though to bid him listen; she bent a little towards him, yet shrank away. ‘Joel, I did it.’

Then the great silence that dwelt upon the hills, and all the quiet that slept in the valleys, seemed to draw together in one mighty stillness and gather itself about Little Hollow; it lasted through an eternity of one little minute of time; it was broken by a movement in the room, and wandered away again. Anne Hatherden stirred

slightly and said to Dinah below her breath :

‘ Did you know ?’

Dinah bowed her head.

Then Anne turned from looking at the two bent figures standing side by side, and put her hand on the girl’s arm and said :

‘ Come.’

She moved slowly from the room, and Dinah followed her ; and again, as on an evening long ago, Joel and Lucy were left alone.

CHAPTER V.

IT seemed a long time before Joel spoke or moved. The woman standing by his side waited a still, dark while as motionless as he; but bit by bit her bent form bent more yet, and after a time she fell upon her knees, and sinking lower still, lay prostrate before him, her head near his feet. Then he spoke.

‘Are you that woman I have cherished all these years as my wife?’

The answer came in a voice he did not know.

‘I am that most miserable woman.’

He waited a little while before he spoke again.

‘May the Lord have mercy upon you!’

A long sob shook the woman's frame, and her hands were clasped about his feet.

‘Joel, Joel, have mercy, you, upon me ! God has damned me years ago ; have mercy, you, upon me, while I live !’

‘My mercy is of no account ; and I—have loved you so. But the Lord—yet if you have repented——’

‘I have never repented—till now—if this is repentance.’ The figure half raised itself, the voice spoke fast and eagerly. ‘All these years, since that evening when I saw him lying before me—Joel, it came so suddenly and it was such an easy thing to do, and in one minute, before I had time to think, it was done—all these years I have never wished that he might be alive again—till now. I have been afraid of the dead face that came and looked at me sometimes in the dusk, still more of the eager, cruel faces of men and women ; I have been afraid of Janet Wace and of her

son and of the power they had over me ; I have been afraid that what I had done might be discovered and of the punishment ; but I have never wished the thing I did undone—I suffered so in the time before I did it that I have never wished the thing undone, I have never truly wished the man I killed alive again—till now.’

‘Never till now? But at the eleventh hour—it says somewhere surely that at the eleventh hour——’

‘Now I would undo it if I could ; now I would go back into the misery, would live through it all again, would give up these ten years of happiness—for I have been happy, Joel, till the last few months when the fear has followed me again, I have been often happy, have forgotten—I am made so that I easily forget, and I have forgotten, and put it all away from me and been happy ; but I would give up the happiness, and go back to the misery now,

because now I have reached a happiness that brings with it despair, because now, in the bitterness and the darkness, I know that I love you, because now I would bear, suffer, die, do anything to spare you the suffering that has come to you through me.'

Joel looked down at her.

'Will you have to die? Will that be the end of it?'

Lucy started up.

'Oh, no!' She knelt before him, and clinging to him said: 'You will shield me now, Joel, you will not give me up to them? I would die here beside you, to save you, to spare you; but that death—the terror of it, and the horror and the helplessness, and the people with their pitiless faces about me once more—no, no, Joel, you will not give me up to that, you will not betray me, you will not tell——'

'God help me!' said Joel. 'You have filled my heart and I cannot see the right.'

‘The right is mercy, for you, if you have loved me. Leave justice to that terrible God who will not forget; but you, though you have ceased to love me, have pity upon me for the sake of the time that is gone!’

‘Pity? God knows I pity you! it’s the pity, maybe, that blinds my sight and makes it so hard for me to see the way. But I was never one to see plain, I was never like Anne——’ Suddenly Joel’s voice changed; he stooped low over the figure before him. ‘The Lord has taken judgment out of my hands; whatever I do, Anne will proclaim the truth.’

Then Lucy rose to her feet and stood before him and looked into his face.

‘Anne? yes. What must I do?’

Joel stood silently thinking, and when he spoke, he spoke very slowly.

‘You have sinned, and the Lord has elected to punish your sin; you must bear what He sends; I see no other way.’

‘No way but the way I have hidden from so long? no way but to wait here, till they come and take me away and kill me?’

Joel shuddered, and his voice was broken as he answered.

‘Ah no! I could not bear it; we must find some other way.’

He leaned against the table; his mouth was twitching; he looked a very old man. In the silence that followed, the door leading into the passage was opened, and Anne Hatherden’s tall form stood in the doorway.

‘Joel, I am going home. Before I go, I have come to ask you what you mean to do.’

‘To do?’ Joel repeated with vague, uncertain utterance.

Anne’s voice grew sterner.

‘Yes; what do you mean to do with the woman who was your wife?’

‘The woman—is still my wife.’

‘In the sight of God, no. The woman you married was an innocent woman, a wronged woman ; the woman who stands there has lived a life that has been one long lie, has sinned the sin of Cain, has chosen her portion with the unbelievers. She is not your wife.’

‘For ten years she has been my wife, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, heart of my very heart. Can I cast her off?’

‘You can ; brother, the Lord helping you, you can. And it is better that your heart should suffer, even to breaking, than that your whole body should be cast into hell fire.’

‘What would you have me do?’

‘You must send her forth from your home ; you must give her back to the world from which you took her ; if justice comes upon her you must leave her to justice.’

‘Justice?’ Lucy raised her downcast head. ‘By justice you mean death ; you

would give me up to death. Oh, have I not been punished? I have sinned, I know, but have I not been punished? Does the fear not count? does the love not count? and is it not punishment that I should have learned to love my husband, and that, I loving him, he should know me for what I am? Is it not enough?’

Anne looked at the trembling woman with a glance that did not waver.

‘It is not enough. The Lord has seen fit to bring your sin to light; the Lord will show what your punishment is to be.’

‘Then you will give me up?’

‘It is not for me to give you up; my duty, as I see it now, will let me give you a chance to escape, will not force me to bring dishonour on a family that’s always been used to stand upright in the sight of God and man. To-morrow I go to London, as I said; I must see Martin Wace and tell him he must never darken this door again; I must see his mother

and tell her that her silence will bring her no more money.'

'You mean that you will leave it to them to send death after me?'

'Yes, and you will have time to go away. If the Lord wills you to be taken, you will be taken, but it is not for me to hinder your escape; my part is only to act so that you can no longer be my brother's wife.'

Joel, standing by the table, his face shrunk and his figure bent, said again in a broken voice :

'She is still my wife.'

'She is not your wife, she shall not be your wife; if that woman and her son do not give her up to justice, I myself will give her up, rather than that her guilty soul should darken your soul, rather than that an earthly love should cut you off from the love of God.'

'You have always hated me,' said Lucy;
'I do not look for mercy from you, any

more than I look for mercy from Janet Wace.' Her voice sank and her words came hurriedly. 'There is only one thing—the woman is old and ill; it may be she is past bearing witness against me, it may be you will not find power or proof to do what you want to do.'

'There is her son.'

'Her son has never known whether his mother spoke the truth—or I.'

'You have confessed your guilt; if proof is needed, I doubt not the Lord will send proof. The coach leaves for Leweston at eight o'clock; by to-morrow afternoon I shall be in London. You can do as seems good to you; I have told you what I mean to do.'

'When will you be back?'

'On the afternoon of Wednesday likely; perhaps not till the next day.'

'On the afternoon of Wednesday I will go to your house and await your coming; if you do not come I will return next day.'

If you have proof I will go forth as you said.'

'If not?'

'I cannot tell; I am not strong like you; I will do as Joel bids me.'

Joel Hatherden, leaning against the table, raised himself up and turned to his sister.

'And I am not strong,' he said. 'I have never been like you, Anne, seeing the hand of the Lord pointing plain, as you have always seen it; I have never been quite able to be sure I was in the right; I have never been certain what was duty and what wasn't. You was always a steady Christian, and I was always sort of weak-kneed, and I've looked up to you all my life; I've always been humble in my mind towards you, even when now and again I've taken my own way.'

'Your own way has been the wrong way, brother. I was against your marrying from the first, and now you see that the Almighty was against it too.'

‘I was never one to see plain,’ said Joel, ‘and I don’t seem to see plain now. I married the woman standing there ten years gone by; I married her because I had a feeling for her I never had to another woman—no, not the wife you chose for me, sister, good Christian though she was—I married her mostly because she was pitiful and helpless, and marrying was the only way I could do her any good.’ Joel paused and looked at his wife. ‘I don’t say,’ he went on, and his voice that had been firm so far began to tremble a little, ‘I don’t say that it’s the same to me now as it was then. She’s different to what I thought her; I thought her the innocentest of God’s creatures, and I find—she’s guilty; and I don’t suppose, forbye the Almighty was to work a miracle and make the past into another past, I don’t suppose she could ever seem quite the same woman any more—never any more.’

His eyes were upon Lucy as he spoke;

she stood a little way away from him ; her hands loosely clasped together hung down before her ; her head was bent, and she did not look up.

‘I don’t know quite what it is in me is changed,’ Joel went on, turning to Anne again ; ‘maybe it’s what you call the earthly love—I can’t say. Only there’s something still the same, and that’s the pitifulness, and it’s the pitifulness makes me feel not quite sure. I don’t seem able to cast her off as you say, sister, because she seems to me to want caring for still ; and having put her deep into my heart so many years ago, and covered her over with a sort of layer of tenderness, I don’t seem able to break the tenderness and put her outside again, without breaking the heart too.’

‘What matter ?’ Anne’s voice trembled a little too. ‘What matter, brother ? The heart’ll stop beating some day, anyhow ; it’s the soul you’ve got to think of.’

‘You’re right, Anne, and the Lord’s a

jealous God, I know ; only this is how it seems to me. If I was to come across any miserable creature anywhere about the world, miserable from sin or from loneliness or whatever it might be, and more especially if it was a little child or a woman, I couldn't but turn and try to give a helping hand ; and if I'd do it for a stranger, ought I to cast away the woman that's been my wife ?'

'You ought ; brother, to save your soul, you ought to cast her off.'

'I can't see it plain,' said Joel ; 'it's because of the pitifulness. She's helpless now, as she was helpless that evening when my heart went out to her ; the Lord's against her, as you say, and the world's against her, and she was never one to be able to stand alone. Somehow, though the wife I had seems dead, the woman I wanted to help long ago is still alive, still seems to want my help ; and I must give it to her still. Sister, I cannot cast her off.'

Then Lucy, sobbing, fell down at his feet again.

‘Your pity hurts me,’ she said, ‘it hurts me. If you had hated me I could have borne it, though yesterday I thought I could not bear your hate; but now—that you should pity me, should almost love me still—that is the worst. Joel, Joel, if I could die now at your feet!’

Anne Hatherden’s voice broke in, sharp and stern.

‘Woman, you blaspheme! your death will come at the time and place God chooses. I am going, brother, and what you are not strong enough to do, I will do; I will save you in spite of yourself.’

She left the room, and Joel stooped down and raised his wife from the ground.

‘I will help you,’ he said, ‘so long as you need my help. We never can be as husband and wife any more, but I will stand by you to the end, and if you must go out into the world again, and it will

help you to have me by you, I will go too.'

Lucy looked at him; her eyes seemed strange in the dim, uncertain light.

'Wait till Anne comes back,' she said; 'when Anne comes back I shall know what to do.'

CHAPTER VI.

A TRAIN came steaming along through the crowd of mean dwellings that are huddled around London ; close past the back windows, sometimes on a level with the roofs, steadily on its way. It paused on a bridge, and trembled as the bridge shook under it. A woman who had been sitting bolt upright, leaned forward with alarm on her face towards the man sitting opposite to her.

‘It’s all right, missus,’ said the man ; ‘another train going over — that’s what makes it shake. You’re new to London, perhaps?’

The woman did not answer ; she was

looking at the river that flowed beneath, at the barges and the steamboats that were borne upon its surface, at the buildings that lined its banks. She was frightened at the crowd of houses, at the dull roar of life that surged towards her, at the thick yellow atmosphere; but all the time her courage was upheld by the thought that she and the Lord were on the same side, and that righteousness was stronger than the wickedness of that great city, into the life of which she was about to enter. She tried to dwell upon the thought; but nevertheless when the train reached the station, and she found herself standing on the platform, a crowd of people rushing past her, jostling her as they went, and noise and confusion all around, her chief feeling was one of utter bewilderment, her chief desire to see some single face that she knew.

By - and - by the crowd of passengers cleared away, and she was left standing

almost alone. A porter on his way along the platform, stopped and said :

‘ Cab, ma’am ?’

‘ No. Which is the way to——’ The woman paused, put her hand into a deep pocket, drew forth a purse, and from the purse took a piece of paper. ‘ Which is the way to Little Sale Street, Westminster ?’

‘ You must go straight across the yard, and out at the gate to the right. It’s a long street you’ll be in then, and when you get to the end of it, you’d better ask again.’

‘ Is it far ?’

‘ I don’t know what you call far ; I don’t call it far ; a mile perhaps — or more.’

‘ I can walk a mile.’

The woman moved on, out of the station and into the bustle of the London streets. It was nearly four o’clock ; a fog, not dense, but thick enough to cloud the

waning daylight, hung over the city ; the lamps were already lighted. Anne Hatherden, with her bundle in her hand, walked slowly along the greasy pavement ; tall buildings rose up on either side and seemed to shut her into a world that was horrible in its strangeness ; and she was dazed with the noise of the vehicles and the hurrying feet of the passers-by. By-and-by, as the long street still showed a further length before her, the purpose that had brought her hither grew strong again, and the desire for Joel's salvation, taking the chief place in her mind, hung as a veil between her eyes and the unfamiliar world about her and partly hid its strangeness. All at once, looking up as she reached a crossing, she saw rising up before her a building that was unlike any of the buildings she had passed. The walls of it were black with age and smoke ; the arching windows, the great door, the square towers rising from its roof showed dimly through the fog ;

the open space beside it seemed to cut it off from the common bricks and mortar of the town, and mark it as something different and apart. It stood alone, and seemed to watch the life that passed it by in pitying sadness. Anne Hatherden stood and gazed at it; then turned to a man who was lounging near at hand.

‘What is it? Is it a church?’

‘Dunno’; it’s th’ Abbey, that’s all I know.’

Anne walked on. When she came nearer, she saw that the great door was shut; but across the flagged space by the building’s side people were passing, and she followed them till she came to a door through which some entered. Anne entered too, and paused as soon as she had entered. Within was a gloom that spread far around, stretching through high arches and a forest of great pillars, and rising high into dim vaulted space; and a silence that seemed to endure in spite of sounds: and

in the midst of the gloom, light showed itself; and from out the silence came a sound of singing.

Anne moved forward, slowly, with something like fear upon her, and came at last to what seemed to her like a church within a church. She stood at the entrance and listened, and the music of many voices, joined in chords together, entered into and stirred her soul. Then, after a time, the words that the choir were singing became distinct to her: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts.’ She knew the words well, and as she listened her heart swelled with triumph.

Yes, the Lord was holy, almighty, and a great God, and she was His servant, she fought on His side, she laboured to uphold the glory of His name. When the music ceased she still stood motionless awhile, looking towards the light; then slowly she shrank back into the darkness, moved through it to the door again, and

passed once more into the bustle and the roar outside.

Little Sale Street was a narrow, dingy street; the dim lamps that lighted it sparsely, seemed to burn yet more dimly than the lamps in the thoroughfares; the houses had a look of having outlived the pride of their first estate. When Anne Hatherden, after much searching, entered it at length, she was very tired; she was weak after her illness, and the walk, the excitement, the noise and bustle she had passed through, had told heavily on her feeble strength. But the strength of her purpose upheld her, and the triumph that the music had awakened in her heart still stirred it and made it brave. ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts’: the words sounded in her ears, and her mind was active with the thought that Joel soon would serve the Lord again with undivided allegiance.

She went on up the street, noting the

numbers as she passed, and at last she reached a door on which stood 18, and she stopped beside it, and waited a minute before she knocked. The door was opened by a woman, tall and stout, who looked at the countrified woman with the bundle in her hand with some curiosity.

‘I want to see Mrs. Wace,’ said Anne Hatherden.

‘Mrs. Wace?’ The woman paused, as though in surprise.

‘Yes, this is the address of her son; I thought, I understood his mother lived with him. Is this not the house where Martin Wace lives?’

‘Yes, he lives here, but his mother—he buried his mother near four months ago.’

‘She is dead?’ There was a cry in the words as Anne Hatherden uttered them.

‘Yes, it was in June, I think, she died. Are you a relation?’

Anne did not answer the question.

‘And Martin Wace?’ she said. ‘Is he here?’

‘He’s not in now ; he’ll be back some time this evening, but there’s no saying when—he comes in all hours.’

‘I must see him.’

‘Will you come in and wait ? or perhaps to-morrow——’

‘I will wait. I must see him to-day.’

The woman looked half suspiciously at the pale, hard face before her, then led the way into a little back room. It was dark, but the woman lighted a jet of gas, and having pulled down the blind, left Anne alone.

Anne Hatherden sat in a sort of stupor ; she did not look round the room, she did not see the many photographs or the other characteristic decorations of Martin Wace’s home ; she only sat quite still, her body worn out by fatigue, her mind full of the discovery she had made ; and the one thought that was clear to her was this :

The woman is dead ; she cannot help me to part Joel from his wife. She thought this thought over and over again, while blank hours passed by ; but at last she looked round and started, for the door had opened, and someone had entered the room. It was Martin Wace ; he stood within the door looking at her, his heavy face dark with anger ; and Anne Hatherden, her dazed mind working slowly, returned his gaze for a minute before she spoke. Then she half rose, and she said the same words that she had said to the woman at the door, and her voice had the same note of anguish that had sounded in it then.

‘ She is dead.’

Martin Wace spoke almost at the same moment.

‘ Why the devil have you come here ?’

Aunt Anne came nearer to him.

‘ Is it true ?’ she said. ‘ Is it true that she is dead ?’

‘ Yes, she’s dead, and be d——d to her

—and to you, too, for coming sneaking and prying where you're not wanted. What brought you here? What devil's errand sent you? Speak, can't you, instead of standing staring there.

‘I came to tell her that the crime she had hidden so long had come to light, that she must come forward and bear witness against the woman she had kept from justice.’

‘You came—it is discovered? I don't understand. Do you mean she really did it after all?’

‘Yes, she did it; I always doubted her from the first, from the time I found her out in a lie. But you—you know and your mother knew; that is why I came—because of the witnessing. And now—she is dead!’

Martin Wace had sat down; his hands were thrust into his pockets, his sullen face was bewildered. At last he looked up.

‘How did you find it out?’ he asked.

Anne Hatherden's mind was recovering its power, and she was able to speak with something of her usual decision as she told of what had taken place at Little Hollow twenty-four hours ago. Martin Wace listened in silence, and when her voice ceased he rose to his feet.

‘So it’s you I’ve got to thank for spoiling my plans is it?’ he said. ‘By G—I’d like to have my way with you! Well, you can finish your dirty work yourself; the game’s played out for me, and I’ve done with it.’

‘But have you no proof? Did she leave nothing to show—no writing?’

‘Writing? What’d be the good of writing after all these years, and the woman dead? I never troubled about getting her to put it down, for I didn’t believe it—thought it was the old woman’s spite, and only used it to play my own game. I wanted the money, and I wanted the girl—afterwards, and I couldn’t have

got either the one or the other if it had come out that mother wasn't still alive. I didn't care a damn whether the woman was innocent or guilty, and I don't care now; I'd rather hurt you of the two. I've lost everything through you; if it hadn't been for you I'd have got my way.'

The man, with his eyes burning with disappointment and fury, came close to the woman as she stood; he shook his fist in her face; then, his passion rising fiercer within him, he struck her on the cheek. The blow was a hard one; Anne Hatherden staggered under it, and was driven against the wall; yet she was hardly conscious it was given, quite unconscious that it hurt her; the anguish of her spirit made her insensible to physical pain. She crept along the wall to the door, and into the passage; then, still groping her way, passed out into the street.

Slowly she moved down its quiet length, back into the roar of the thoroughfare,

and always the thought repeated itself: There is no way to save him; and always through the thought there went a sweet sound of singing. But there was mockery in the sweetness of the sound, and mockery in the glory of the words: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts.'

CHAPTER VII.

ALL through the night Anne Hatherden wrestled before the Lord. In the stuffy little bedroom of the city inn, she knelt in the darkness and prayed aloud for her brother's soul. She had always distrusted the woman who was Joel's wife, always feared her as the stumbling-block in his way towards righteousness; but hitherto Joel himself had believed his wife to be innocent, had in giving her his love given it to one who had seemed to him, at least, to be pure and good, and in so far had not directly or deliberately sinned. Now it was different; now, if he still held to his wife, he held to her knowing the evil she had

done, knowing that she was at enmity with God, knowing that she was a child of the devil; now, if he still kept his love for her in his heart, he deliberately chose an earthly love instead of the heavenly one, and consciously and of free will cast away his hope of salvation. This it was that made Anne's anguish so bitter, this it was that made her helplessness so terrible to bear. Joel was weak, but she was strong, and she would have had the courage to stab him to the heart to save his soul; but the power to do so was taken out of her hands; after the many years of watching and of praying, the worst that she had feared was proved to be the truth; and when it had seemed that out of the worst might come salvation, suddenly the hope in her was killed, and in its stead was a despairing fear that mocked at all she had tried to do. She prayed aloud in her anguish; she bowed her head to the ground, and struggled hard against the despair that threatened her

faith; she called upon the Lord again and again in broken, entreating words to hear her and to help her.

But after a time the outward words were hushed, and all the tumult of love and agony struggled silently in Anne Hatherden's soul. For in the loneliness of the night a sudden thought had come to her, and in the darkness she had seen a way of deliverance. The way was a dark and dreadful way—she would not look along it; the thought was a sinful thought—she would not think it; she would not look, she would not listen, for her own salvation came before Joel's salvation; to save her own soul was the first, chief duty of her existence; and she, who had walked in the way of righteousness all her life, who had held to the naked truth and hated and scorned a lie, who had resisted the devil and his works, and gloried in her resistance, could not bear the thought, even, of falling away. She would not

admit the thought, she would not look upon the temptation, she would defy the tempter; and yet the struggle went on, and yet the one strong human love of her life cried loudly in its strength. All through the night it cried, all through the night the battle raged, all through the weary, unquiet, London night Anne Hatherden wrestled with the might of her own nature, risen in despair against her; till at last the dawn looked in at the window, and shed a faint light upon the bent, kneeling form, upon the gray hair falling about the worn face, upon the hollow eyes.

Then the struggle ceased; for when she saw the morning Anne Hatherden rose to her feet, and stretched her arms on high, and raised her deep-lined face, and looked upwards with her hopeless eyes. She spoke aloud, and the words that she said were these:

‘His soul, great, just God, rather than my soul! Save *his* soul, oh my God!’

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was dusk at Little Hollow, and the wind moaned wearily outside the windows and cried in the chimneys. Joel Hatherden was ill in bed ; the shock that had come upon him had robbed him of his strength, and he lay, conscious but in an apathy that was almost like unconsciousness, knowing that he suffered, yet not fully understanding the greatness of the trouble that had befallen him. As he lay quite still in the dusk, Lucy entered the room ; she came to his bedside and stood looking down at him in silence. He stirred slightly, and feebly held out a hand towards her ; then she spoke.

‘Joel, I am going.’

‘Going?’

‘To Anne. She will be back, likely, by now.’

A trembling shook the figure in the bed.

‘Ah—I remember. You will not be long?’

‘I can’t say; it depends on what news she brings. I may need to be alone for a while, to think, after I have seen her. I shall go for a walk perhaps—along the shore.’

‘It will be dark and lonesome.’

‘I shall not mind the darkness, or—yes I shall mind the being alone, but it will not be for long.’

Lucy bent over the bed; her eyes sought the weary eyes below her.

‘Joel, tell me, you could not bear it if they came and took me away, and—and killed me?’

‘No, no, oh no, I could not bear it.’

‘No—nor I.’

The woman stood still a little while, a vacant look in her eyes; then once more she bent over the bed.

‘Good-bye, Joel.’

‘Good-bye.’

She bent lower yet.

‘Husband, you said I was no more your wife; I have no right to kiss you; yet just once—I never will ask again—just once, let me kiss you before I go.’

There came no answer from the lips below, but she stooped and kissed him gently on the forehead, then turned and walked slowly to the door and passed out of the room.

Outside in the garden Dinah was waiting.

‘May I go with you?’ she asked, as Lucy appeared.

‘No, I must see Anne alone.’

‘I could wait outside.’

‘You had better not wait. Afterwards

I may want to walk a bit—along the shore, and—I must be alone.'

'Do not go far along the shore—the tide must be already on the turn.'

'You need not fear; I know when the tide is full. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye.'

'Dinah, you have been very good to me. I thank you.'

'There is no need for thanks.' The girl spoke wearily, and she added under her breath: 'I have done no good.'

Lucy passed on, through the gateway and up towards the fields. Dinah waited a few minutes, then followed her.

Lucy walked steadily on, and the dusk seemed to gather about her as she went; overhead the dark, low clouds sped swiftly by, driven by the sullen wind, and all around the downs were desolate. She reached Anne's cottage and knocked. There was a little space of waiting, and then the

door was opened ; Anne Hatherden stood in the doorway and signed to Lucy to enter.

The pale daylight outside was darkened within the room, and there was no fire in the grate ; Anne's bonnet and shawl lay on a chair near the window ; and the window framed a square of leaden-coloured waves with here and there white foam showing cold upon their gloomy heights, as they came on and on towards the shore.

Lucy drew near to Anne and looked with eager, questioning glance into her face ; then, as Anne did not speak, her lips asked the question in her eyes.

‘ Must I go ? ’

Anne answered in a low, hard voice :

‘ You must go. ’

‘ She will betray me then, this woman ? She is able—strong enough, her mind clear enough, to witness against me ? And after all these years she hates me still ? ’

The low, hard, toneless voice answered again :

‘She will give you up to justice ; she is strong and well ; her mind is clear ; and after all these years she still is resolved you shall not escape.’

For a moment Lucy covered her face with her hands ; when she looked back at Anne again she was quite pale, and her eyes were terrified ; she spoke in a whisper.

‘Then I must go?’

‘Yes, you must go. I will help you—I will give you all the money I have.’

‘I do not want money ; I have all I need.’

‘You must go far away ; Joel must never hear of you again. You said once that you would sacrifice yourself for love’s sake ; the only thing you can do now is never to let him hear of you again.’

‘I know. It is the only thing. He never shall hear from me again.’

‘You must go soon—to-morrow at latest.’

‘I will go to-night.’

‘To-night?’ Anne started. ‘How do you go?’

‘I have made my plans.’

Lucy turned and moved towards the door with lingering steps ; she paused when she had reached it.

‘I came here under the shelter of a lie ; for that you hated me. But you have found out the lie and punished me ; you should not hate me still.’

In the last words there was a touch of questioning, a shade of entreaty. Anne, standing by the table, with her deep-set eyes fixed on the figure at the door, answered no word. For a minute Lucy waited ; the wind, moaning outside, seemed to pause at the window and catch its breath, and listen

for an answer ; but no answer came, and Lucy passed out and closed the door behind her. Anne Hatherden fell upon her knees.

‘I am lost for ever and ever. Great God, for justice and for mercy’s sake, save his soul instead of my lost soul !’

CHAPTER IX.

THE room seemed full of darkness ; Anne Hatherden, her pale face set and hard, went to the door, opened it, and stood outside on the step, looking along the road. The road was quite deserted ; no moving figure broke its lonely length ; the woman she had seen for the last time must have walked very quickly. She turned her eyes towards the shore and the sea ; the scattered rocks showed dim along the beach, and the cliffs at Love's End Point had an air of mystery in the dusk. Anne looked, and bent forward, and looked again ; something moved, surely, amongst the rocks, something went on and on along the beach, indistinct but always moving, further and further away.

Anne Hatherden stood and watched, and her heart beat faster ; she looked along the beach, she glanced back towards the little group of fishermen's huts on the way to Barhaven, she hesitated. Her breath came quickly ; her hands drew together and grasped each other in a tight hard grasp, her sad eyes, lighted up by fear, looked quickly all about her and up towards the sky. A great horror had seized upon her ; she knew as she stood there the way that Lucy would go, she knew what the night would bring. But still she did not stir, and still the thought that repeated itself again and again, as with a voice that sounded through all the twilight air, was this : For his sake, for his sake at the last. For a long time she stood fighting with the knowledge within her, unconscious of everything but this knowledge and the thought that cried to her ; till at last in her desperation a new desperate thought sprang into being ; and all at once a great quiet fell

upon her struggling spirit, and a dull cold feeling calmed the wild fever of her brain; the bent form drew itself upright again, and the quivering face grew still with resolve. Just a moment she waited, looked back along the road that led through Sleepy Dale to Little Hollow, then turned once more towards the sea and followed the dim figure along the shore.

The threatening clouds overhead were parted now, and there was more light in the sky; but on the earth the dusk increased, and the dark waves broke upon the beach with a dreary sound. Anne Hatherden went steadily on; now and again she stumbled on the uneven shore; and once she fell and cut her hand against the sharp point of a rock: but she did not notice that blood fell from the wound, she did not feel that she was hurt; her consciousness was absorbed in watching the shadowy figure ahead, drawing nearer and nearer to Love's End Point.

The wind was growing stronger ; it loosened her gray hair and sent some straggling locks streaming about her face, it blew against her, and seemed to beat her back ; but still the figure ahead moved on, and still Anne followed it.

The tide was coming in ; slowly the waves encroached upon the shore, slowly the wide sea widened itself yet further, slowly the beach grew less. The water was a long way from the cliffs that rose up tall from the shingle where Anne walked, but not very far from the rocks that ran out from Love's End Point. The Point was not far away now ; before her it rose, reaching out towards the sea ; and Anne bent her footsteps outwards, nearer to the water, and the sound of the waves in her ears grew louder. The ceaseless sound and the wind rushing by confused her brain ; her tired limbs staggered under her, her loosened hair half blinded her as she went ; yet still she laboured on, and still

her dim sight sought and found the figure on ahead, that had reached the rocks now, that took its way along the little zigzag path winding through them, that never paused. Then, when the rocks were passed, the figure turned inlands towards the cliffs, and disappeared behind the Point.

Anne followed on by the way that it had gone ; the water had almost reached the little pathway ; already the spray leaped up near her as she went. The rocks were passed and lay, an uneven barrier, behind her, and before her was the desolate rock-strewn beach of Love's End Stretch. Steep cliffs rose up and bordered it on the landward side, and all along from point to point stretched a line of breaking waves.

Anne Hatherden looked neither at the waves nor at the cliffs ; her eyes sought once again the figure she had followed so long. She found it soon ; it was still now, and she drew near to it, slowly. The back

of the figure was towards her, but as her footsteps sounded on the pebbly beach, it turned with a start, and with her mind's sight rather than her earthly eyes, she saw again the face of Lucy Hatherden.

Lucy shrank back, then came again quickly forward.

‘Who is it?’ she asked below her breath.

‘Who is it?’

‘It is I—Anne.’

‘Anne? You have no right to follow me, I——’

‘I have the right.’

Anne came closer to the drooping figure of the younger woman, and then in silence she and Lucy looked through the dusk into each other's faces. Lucy spoke at last.

‘Why have you followed me?’

‘By-and-by I will tell you.’

‘By-and-by will be too late. Already the sea is over the further rocks; soon it will cover them all. Do you see that rock there — the black one standing a little

apart? When the waves reach that rock—I know it well—there is no passing back.’

‘When the waves reach that rock, I will tell you why I have come.’

‘But you—do you understand? Do you mean——’

‘I mean to stay with you.’

The elder woman’s face was set in firm, hard lines; she turned and looked towards the sea. The dark waves were drawing nearer; the wind sweeping over them touched their crests with foam; overhead the sky was almost clear, and a faint red flushed it.

Lucy stood by Anne’s side, and she too looked towards the sea and at some isolated rocks that rose above the waves now, but would be covered when the tide was full. And standing there, she thought of words that Joel had spoken long ago: ‘You put me in mind of one of those rocks that stand far out from the shore, and never can

get away; but wait there, with none to help or save, till the waves come over them and swallow them.' The words came back to her, and she uttered a cry and turned involuntarily towards the chain of rocks. The waves had reached the black jagged peak that forbade return, and climbed its sides and dashed over it; near her Anne stood quite still and watched them. Then Lucy, in her fear and loneliness, stretched out her hand towards Anne's hand, and clasped it: Anne did not move, and hand in hand the two women stood and watched the tide come in.

When the black rock was covered over, Anne turned; she moved her lips as though about to speak, but the words would not come; and presently she turned back in silence towards the sea.

The minutes went by and lengthened into half an hour; the shore was very narrow now, the sullen waves were near the cliffs. Still, side by side, Lucy and

Anne Hatherden watched them as they came; the lone rocks were hidden in the water, the Point looked far out in the sea. Then at last Anne spoke.

‘It was a lie I told you. Janet Wace is dead.’

‘Dead?’ Lucy’s eyes showed that she took no meaning from the words.

‘Yes, she is dead. There was no witness against you.’

Then suddenly the words were real to Lucy’s mind, and she started from the woman beside her with a cry.

‘No witness? Oh you who hated me, had you not done enough?’

Anne answered in her dull, expressionless voice :

‘You stood between Joel and his salvation; he must have perished by his love for you. I sinned, I gave my own soul to save his.’

‘No hope, no help!’ The kindly apathy that had fallen upon Lucy was

changed by Anne's words to a passion of horror ; she wrung her hands, she beat herself against the steep hard cliffs. Anne spoke to her again without moving.

‘ Stay quiet at the last ; death is very near now. Pray to the Lord for mercy on your soul.’

Lucy crept back to her side again.

‘ You pray. I have never known how to pray like you.’

‘ I cannot pray ; my name is taken from the Book of Life.’

Seated on a little ledge of rock Anne Hatherden sat, still looking out to sea, and Lucy crouched beside her ; there was mortal fear in Lucy's eyes, and in Anne's a fulness of despair. The darkness grew, and the waves came on and on, gently now that all the rocks were passed, but never pausing, never lingering on their way to the goal they had to reach. At last a wave touched Lucy's feet ; she started up with a wild, shrill cry ; then, seeing the

dark water so near, sank down again and hid her face in Anne's lap. Anne put a hand upon her head, gently, as though to quiet her; and so they waited.

The waves came on and on; the night thickened; far out a boat went past the rocks of Love's End Point.

CHAPTER X.

A_FAR off Dinah had followed Lucy along the dusky road. She waited at a distance while Anne and Lucy talked together in the cottage; she saw Lucy come forth; she watched her take her way along the beach. Then Dinah went forward again — not along the shore, but up the higher ground on to the cliffs, and from their edge watched the black speck that moved on by the water's side and rounded the Point. High up on the cliffs Dinah passed the Point too, and gazed down at the dim figure on the desolate beach below; then she turned, and with her utmost speed ran back towards the fishermen's huts on the way to Barhaven.

Half an hour later a boat set out from the shore ; two men pulled strong against the incoming tide, and in the stern sat Dinah Hatherden. On the beach a group of men and women watched them for a while, then set out along the cliffs towards Love's End Point.

Soon through the village the news was spread : Joel Hatherden's wife had gone beyond the Point, had lingered too long and been cut off by the sea, and James Fale's boat was on its way to the rescue. The lonely cliffs were awake with life this evening ; across the darkened fields and over the short, close turf of the downs the men and women of Sleepy Dale sped in eager haste. Some of the men took ropes, some of the women carried babies in their arms ; and all as they went spoke of Joel Hatherden lying ill in bed, and of how his heart was set upon his wife, and of how venturesome it was to pass Love's End Point when the tide was coming in.

On the cliffs above, an eager group was gathered; men lay down flat and looked over the edge into the darkened depths below; and the women stood a few paces back and questioned anxiously as to what was to be seen; and talked in whispers amongst themselves of that night long ago, when the woman, whose peril now roused strong pity in their hearts, had stood among them all and begged for mercy.

The water was very near the cliffs; faintly the sound of breaking waves came up; but the wind was boisterous, and carried the shouts of the watchers inland across the downs, and brought no answering sound out of the depths. But all at once, above the wind, above the calling voices, a cry rose up, shrill, terrible, and wild; for a moment a blank silence fell upon the watching group; then answering shouts went forth; but no sound rose again out of the dusk below.

Over the dark waves the boat drew nearer to the cliffs, and nearer yet; and

Dinah, with her young eyes straining through the half-darkness, called again and again in her clear voice: 'Mother!' and yet again: 'Mother!' But no voice answered, and all along, the cliffs showed blank.

The boat drew nearer yet; it was very near; and now in the dim light could be seen some dark thing pressed against the cliff. The boat came close to it, as close as the men dared row to the rocks; then, while the one man held the boat as steady as he might, the other went over the side into the sea.

On the little projecting ledge of rock Anne Hatherden still sat with blank, fixed eyes, while the waves climbed about her feet, and the leaping spray dashed over her; and Lucy still crouched, kneeling, beside her; but Lucy's eyes were closed.

The boat drew out to sea, and rounded the Point, and neared the shore again; and on the beach the crowd, trooping down

from the cliffs, hastened to await its coming. An awed silence was upon the people, but it was broken by whisperings, as the news spread amongst them that Anne Hatherden had been with her brother's wife.

It was Anne who was borne first through the pitying crowd ; a faint cheer went up when it was found that she still lived ; and the women pressed forward to catch a glimpse of the white, stony face. But Lucy's face was covered, and the women drew back in silence, and the men raised their hats as she was carried by ; for Lucy was dead.

Epilogue.

‘ And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.’
CLOUGH.

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER I.

THE wild autumn passed and the cold, long winter, and spring was born anew in Sleepy Dale.

On a still, mild evening Dinah and Jim Saryll stood by the garden gate of Little Hollow.

‘I make only one condition,’ Dinah said, looking up towards the long green hill with the white band up its side; ‘you must never speak to me of what happened before your mother died, you must never ask me why I did what I did. I have told you that I did it to shield her from some-

thing that she feared, and I have told you that my doing it was useless, because Martin Wace had no real power over her ; for the rest you must trust me ; the time that is past is a time I shall never speak of again.'

' I shall never speak of it,' said Jim. ' I can and do trust you, and I give you my promise that that time of darkness shall be, as far as I can make it, as if it had never been.'

For another ten minutes the man and the girl lingered by the gate, talking no more of the past, but all of the future ; then Jim went up the road over the hill, and Dinah went back to the house.

Joel Hatherden sat by the fire in the hall of Little Hollow. He was very bent and grey, and his face was marked with many lines that had not been there a year ago. Dinah went to him and stood by his side ; after a minute he spoke.

' Have you and Jim made it up ?'

' Yes, father.'

‘I thought as much.’

There was a little pause before Joel spoke again.

‘Dinah!’

‘Yes, father.’

‘Did you tell him—all the story of that time?’

‘No. I thought there was no need; and it is much better that he should not know. I told him he must never ask me about that time.’

‘And he—did he agree?’

‘Yes.’

‘It is well. I’m glad he does not know.’

Joel rose and took a few turns up and down the room; he stopped beside his daughter, and taking her hand, led her to the broad seat opposite the fireplace.

‘Dinah,’ he said, ‘while you were out in the garden there, I’ve been thinking.’ He waited a little while, but presently went on, in the old, hesitating way. ‘We

shall never know the truth about that night—how she came to go beyond the Point when the tide was so high, nor whether they were friends at the last, those two. The Lord has laid His hand on Anne and darkened her mind, and I doubt she'll never be able to tell us how it all came about.'

'I wouldn't think about it, father,' said Dinah; 'I mean as to wondering how it happened.'

'I don't, Dinah,' said Joel, 'I don't—not often that's to say—seeing the Lord's seen fit to hide it from me; only I'd like, somehow, to know if they'd been friends.'

Dinah was silent, and after a minute Joel went on speaking.

'I was thinking,' he said, 'while you were out yonder, that after you're married I'd bring Anne back again to where she was born. There's only her and me now, and I can never know.'

'Know what, father?'

‘Whether they were friends. Yet I don’t know it should make any difference—rightly. I could feel tenderer to Anne if I thought they were friends; and yet—if it wasn’t so, even if she was against her to the end, I don’t know that I’ve any right to act harsh-like.’

‘I think you have never been harsh to anyone, father.’

‘I’ve come to think it’s only the Lord has any right to act harsh-like—or what seems to us harsh-like,’ Joel went on, without noticing Dinah’s words, ‘only the Lord, seeing He’s the only one can see quite plain. And so I think I’ll bring Anne back again. If they were friends I’d like to do it, and if not—well, it’s better to be gentle, I’ve been thinking, if you’re one that doesn’t see plain.’ He was silent a minute, and then he added slowly: ‘So it ’ld be right, I take it, either way.’

Then he rose and went back to his usual seat by the fire.

CHAPTER II.

IT was the day after Dinah's wedding. In the hall of Little Hollow sat Anne Hatherden, in the chair in which she had been used to sit many years ago, and Joel sat by the fireside and watched her. That very afternoon he had brought her home again, and he had fancied that the sight of the familiar room and all the many things about her that she knew, had caused some slight change in the apathy that had closed upon her on the evening on which she had met death face to face; and in his heart a faint hope rose up, that perhaps, after all, he might learn at last how Lucy had died.

Ever since that evening, Anne's face had worn the same set expression, her eyes had looked forth with the same look of despair, her lips had spoken only stray muttered words. And now the doctor said that if the fact of finding herself amidst the surroundings that had been familiar to her for so many years did not rouse her from her apathy, there was little chance that she would ever again be conscious of the life that passed around her. So Joel sat watching anxiously ; he fancied that the strange fixed eyes had looked round restlessly once or twice, he fancied that the lips moved now and again, he fancied that from time to time a quiver passed across the still, blank face.

The clock struck six, and as it struck Anne started, glanced round, and trembled. Joel leaned forward and spoke to her, but she did not answer, and the old anguished look came back to her face again. It was very quiet all around ; and in the twilight

stillness the old clock in the corner—the clock that, together with Anne Hatherden, had made punctuality so rigid in the household for many years—held undisputed sway with its ticking.

The minutes went by, and the hands of the clock moved round, on and on towards the hour of seven ; still Anne sat, stiff and motionless, and still Joel watched her. The time went on, and then at last, amidst the ticking came another sound, the whirring, grating sound that the old clock always made five minutes before striking the hour. Joel started as he heard it, and Anne too started ; slowly she turned her head, slowly a new look came into her face, slowly she gazed around her ; and Joel, half risen from his seat, watched her with trembling hope. Then, still looking round as though in search of something that her dim eyes failed to find, at last Anne spoke aloud.

‘ Dinah!’ she said; and when no answer came, her voice grew sterner. ‘ Dinah, put

away your book, and turn your thoughts to a better world.'

She paused again, and in the pause the clock struck seven strokes.

'Dinah!' The voice was almost imploring now; there was a curious, half-doubtful look on the face. 'Dinah, come!'

Then Joel Hatherden came forward from the corner where he had watched, and went softly to the figure in the chair, and placed his folded hands in the figure's lap, as many years ago Dinah had been used to do, when, at seven o'clock every evening, she had said her prayers. Looking up, he saw a smile come over the face; and he knew the meaning of its strangeness and its peace, and knew that he would never learn now what had passed on the night when Lucy had died.

Anne spoke again, and the words she spoke were the words of the Lord's Prayer, said slowly as she had said them in Dinah's

childish days ; and Joel, in a low voice, repeated after her each petition.

Then, when the prayer was finished, she still went on : ‘ Oh Lord, bless all this household, wash out my sins, and save my soul, and deliver me from the pains of hell ;’ and Joel, speaking after her, said the words again : ‘ Wash out my sins, and save my soul, and deliver me from the pains of hell.’

Outside the pink glow of the sunset died slowly away, and night, rising from the valleys, met night descending from the sky, and joining in one strength together upon the hills, cast a still darkness over Sleepy Dale and folded quiet arms about Little Hollow.

All through the evening, Anne Hatherden sat with the new, strange smile upon her face ; despair and grief had ceased to trouble her ; and her mind was as the mind of a little child, except that it could never change or grow. From that evening

there lived through all her future only a far-off past, and in her darkened mind the only light was the light of long ago. She lived for many years, and Joel Hatherden stayed with her and cared for her till she died.

THE END.

[October, 1891.



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